

THE MISTAKES OF A LIFE

Catherine Anne Hubback





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THE MISTAKES OF A LIFE.

CHAPTER I.

Still in my heart that cry goes on,
For ever gone! for ever gone!

GOLDEN LEGEND.

To describe the trepidation of my spirits after this conversation would be impossible. Strong as my love for Theodore really was, and absolute as my belief in him might be in general, there would be moments of misgiving, moments when my respect and affection for St. John made me stagger in my belief towards the other. I knew Mr. Suffield must have

had good foundations for his opinions, or he would not have interfered. And suppose he should be right? what then?

Then when I thought of myself, there was the mortifying conviction that I must have sunk immeasurably in his respect, when he discovered how far I had strayed from the open, straight path of womanly rectitude and decorum! He might talk of esteem, and trust in me, but could he really feel either?

I was humiliated and abashed.

Still he did not *know* the worst; he only guessed it; and perhaps he might never know it. How deeply my heart was engaged in this affair, he need not discover, unless I succeeded in bringing it to a prosperous issue. I did not give myself any time to reflect on what the result would be if Theodore persisted in secrecy; all I wished at the present moment was to conceal my agitated feelings. Sir Thomas Fenton dined with us that day, and in receiving his attentions, I was able to dispel reflection, till I was again alone.

I had promised to meet Theodore the next day as soon after eleven as possible. I sat in the drawing-room with Grace and Mrs. Brook as usual. St. John came in just as we left the breakfast table, and also—as usual—read to us, until when the appointed hour drew near, I scribbled on a scrap of paper:—

“ I am going to meet M. M., for the purpose mentioned, and trusting to your secrecy, renew my promise. Do not let me be followed, and I will be back in an hour.”

I threw this down on the table before him, and with an expressive look, left the room. Very slowly and thoughtfully I walked to the rendezvous. Suppose the result were unfavourable to my wishes, could I keep the promise by which I had voluntarily bound myself? I was very weak, and I dared not contemplate such an alternative. Theodore *must, should* yield! If he would do no more, he should at least explain his situation to St. John; and, supported by his approbation, guided by his opinion, we would consent to

separate if necessary, for the present, that we might meet hereafter on happier terms.

This was my idea, as I reached the spot where my lover was impatiently waiting for me.

The gravity of my looks caught his attention immediately, and he eagerly inquired what was the matter.

I had intended to begin with circumspection, and introduce my arguments carefully, but every idea of the kind vanished now, and I exclaimed, abruptly :—

“Theodore, you must come and explain to my father your situation, and appear openly at home as my suitor !”

Just the thing which, in sober earnest, I knew was impossible, and which I had determined not to ask. The natural reply was an exclamation of astonishment, and inquiry if I were mad.

“No, I am perfectly serious; this is the last time I mean to meet you here, in a way which makes me blush to think of. Hence-

forth, you must, if you wish to see me, seek me at my father's house."

Such a scowl passed over his brow; and when it cleared off, there remained fixed an expression of indignation which I did not like, it bordered on contempt.

"Is that all you have to ask?" said he, in a low, constrained voice.

"Will you comply with this, dear Theodore?" said I, trembling, and laying an anxious hand upon his arm.

I believe he was struggling for self-command; his compressed lips were white, and the muscles round his mouth, by their twitching, showed his internal agitation. I watched him narrowly. His brow gradually cleared, before he answered; and fondly taking my hand, as he turned to me with a smile, he said:

"What new caprice has seized my betrothed, that she comes to prove me by such propositions?"

"It is no caprice, Theodore; it may put

your love to the proof, but it must be done!"

I answered, earnestly.

"So it shall as soon as it can be, consistently with other duties," he replied, quietly.

"Why not at once?"

"You know; to ask your hand would be to acknowledge my faith, and ruin to all my family would ensue."

"But, Theodore, this is an ungrounded fear, I am sure; my family could shield you in England, from any possible harm, and my fortune would support you, and all belonging to you."

He gravely shook his head, and repeated "Impossible."

"I am sure your objections must arise from ignorance of our ways and customs, Theodore."

"No, Henrietta; but your urgency comes from not understanding ours."

"Then let me propose an alternative. Consult a friend of mine, state the whole case

to him, take his advice as to what you can safely do, and if he judges with you, that secrecy is still necessary, I will agree; if he takes my view, you shall submit to his verdict."

"And what friend do you suggest, and wish to invest with such power?" said Theodore, gloom again gathering in his eyes.

"St. John Suffield, my future brother-in-law."

"St. John Suffield—my former rival!" he exclaimed, with a flash of anger.

I was silent from pride.

"Henrietta, why insult me by such a proposition?" he added, impetuously, striking his hands together.

"The insult is to *me*, in using such language Monsieur," said I, indignantly, drawing up my head.

"May I ask," inquired he, in a voice quivering with emotion, "if Mr. Suffield suggested this plan to you, Miss Moore?"

"He did; not directly, but he agreed to it;

and I promised that my future conduct should depend on his decision. If you consult him, it will be easy to arrange as to what we shall do; if you refuse, I have pledged him my word to see you no more here, in this way."

Theodore sprang to his feet and stood before me, trembling with passion. After one or two choking sounds—vain efforts to speak, he exclaimed :—

"And what has become then of your prior vows to me! of the pledge you gave me of secrecy and truth?"

My spirit was thoroughly roused now. Theodore despairing, adoring, entreating, was irresistible; I could not harden myself against love so vehement and flattering. But Theodore enraged, unjust, and overbearing, might frighten, but would never soften me. My pride was equal to his, if my passions were less vehement. His tone and voice offended me deeply. I rose also, and drawing back, I replied :—

“To inquiries made in so unbecoming a manner, I will not condescend to answer.”

“And in what manner would it be becoming in me to express my feelings at finding that you had broken your faith, forgotten your promises, and endangered me, and all dearest to me, by revealing to the spy of my bitterest enemy the hopes and wishes most necessary to be concealed. Should I kiss your hand and say, Madam, I thank you, I am obliged that you have defeated my dearest plans, that you have exposed me to suspicion, contempt, and dishonour on one side, or to vengeance inevitable on the other; that you have condemned me to a perpetual exile, or perpetual imprisonment; to misery and poverty here without advantage to my cause, or to suffering there without honour to my name. I am grateful to you for these favours; oblige me farther by trampling on my affections, and mocking at my presumptuous love; make the heart you have won a subject for your witty satire amongst your rich English friends;

divert yourself by laughing at the infatuation of the Italian priest, who madly imagined that he had secured your love."

He stopped, I believe from his passion depriving him of words, and even of the power of articulation. I stood before him like a statue. I knew this mood would pass, and that in proportion to the vehemence of his present fury, would be the depth of his penitence. When he was silent, I answered gravely:

"St. John is not a spy, he is a true friend to me. I am not a traitress, but an injured and insulted woman. Though I might justify myself if I would; to language such as this I will grant nothing; I will explain nothing! Did I not know how much pain your intemperate conduct will cause you, I should be more angry than sorry for you. Now, remember, I will *never* meet you here again, and take this warning—you had better keep off Mr. Suffield's premises yourself."

I moved to go. I had to pass him, and

the path was narrow. He would not let me proceed. He spread out his arms to bar the way; he did not speak, he only uttered inarticulate sounds, and his face was convulsed. I waited a moment, and then haughtily said:

"I shall be obliged if you will suffer me to pass."

"Pardon!" he exclaimed, clasping his hands, but not moving a step. I was silent.

"Pardon!" he repeated, in the same suffocated voice, as if he had no power to utter another word.

I felt softened. "I knew you would be sorry," I said, looking at him. "I will leave you to repent."

"Leave me to despair," he exclaimed, "Henrietta, beloved Henrietta."

I stopped and hesitated. I suppose he saw his advantage. "One moment," he whispered.

"If you can be rational," I said; "but to converse with a man under the influence of

mistakes which delude him to such a degree is but waste of time."

"Henrietta, my passion is gone; but my fear and my sorrow alike remain. Your betrayal of our secret may have the most fatal consequences. Of what I said, the manner was unpardonable, but the substance was truth. I am not one of your cold countrymen. I cannot contemplate unmoved such ruin to my dearest hopes. I gave way to emotions which undoubtedly were too violent, but not unfounded."

"They were totally and entirely unfounded, Monsieur," I replied, deliberately; "and were you in a state to listen to reason and calm expostulation, I would prove that they were so."

"May I venture to ask," said he, clasping his hands in an attitude of supplication, "that you will explain? Not for my sake, for I deserve nothing, but for the sake of justice and truth."

"I do not know that I have any more time than inclination now," was my reply. "You have wasted in extravagant declamations of anger the moments which might have been given to rational discourse, and to arranging some plans for the future. And now we must part. I have pledged my word to return home within an hour; and more than that, I have promised absolutely not to repeat these stolen interviews. It is, as I told you, the last meeting we shall have."

I spoke with a firmness which surprised myself; but somehow, although I talked of a *last* meeting, I did not realise the idea; I expected fully that he would yield, or that something would occur, some accident, some chance, some sudden change of circumstances to prevent my being so very unhappy as a final parting would have made me. At the worst, I knew that if I gave up our meetings, we might still correspond, there would be nothing to prevent that.

“An hour!” was his reply, “but you have been here only five minutes at most.”

I looked at my watch, half an hour only had flown since we had met; there was still time to spare. He pleaded with me earnestly that I should again sit down, and say what was to be said, deliberately and calmly. I yielded, for I wished it spoken.

I told him that I had not betrayed our secret, but that it had betrayed itself. Apparently his steps had been watched, our meetings had been discovered, and had reached St. John's ears. The consequences of this discovery I detailed to him.

“Now,” said I, ‘you see how unjust you were; how kind and true St. John is; and how perfectly right he is in his representations. What could I do less or more than I have done? It is for you to act now. Confide in him, and he will help you at once to arrange some plan by which all these objections might be overruled or obviated. Trust in him, and all will be well.”

“Darling Henrietta,” he replied, “I do not wonder that your upright and candid mind cannot discover that this whole proceeding is an artful snare, of which St. John Suffield is only one of the tools or baits. It is so natural to you to trust; your whole nature is so confiding and generous. But, oh, the base treachery of those who take advantage of your goodness to deceive you, and would use your affection as a lure to make me their victim!”

“Nonsense, Theodore,” I interrupted him, “you are too suspicious. You are in England, a free country, not a land of conspiracy and treason. Your head is bewildered by the intrigues of your native land, until you fancy every stranger a spy, and every question a snare. Reflect a moment; what object could St. John have in interfering, except my character?”

“A thousand! you little know, love, how many intrigues, even in this country, spread below the surface which we see. But I

cannot reveal more ; you *must* take my word, and believe that all this is only a part of the plan my enemies have made to ensnare me."

"And what then?" said I, earnestly, and beginning to feel uneasy, for I saw Theodore did *not* mean to yield to my entreaties.

"That I dare not grant what you ask. Don't frown, let me smooth away that contraction of your brow by my lips, dearest!"

I drew back coldly.

"You are angry, carissima mia, what can I do? What would you have me say but the truth!" continued he, anxiously, and in a voice of most touching tenderness.

"Then, Theodore, listen ; since you will not make this small concession for my sake, I have promised absolutely to break off these meetings. I will not, I must not, see you again. I gave my word to St. John, and my character is at stake, as well as my truth. For worlds would I not forfeit St. John's esteem, and only in this way can I retain it."

"St. John's esteem!" repeated he, "and is

that the real motive which prompts you to this cruel determination? Can his esteem make up to you for my love; are your views and affections so easily swayed, that the fear of his reproaches can influence you beyond all concern for my agony? If you loved me, Henrietta, you could not, you would not so calmly announce this determination."

"If you loved *me*, Theodore, you would value my character beyond every selfish consideration."

"Henrietta, you are not sincere, you do not own your real motives," he exclaimed, angrily, "but you cannot blind me. This English baronet, this rich and gay Sir Thomas—yes, yes, I see it all; he offers a far better match than any prospect I can hold out, and what can love, even such love as mine, oppose to ambition and a desire of wealth? This is the real motive, veil it as you will."

"Theodore!" I exclaimed, impatiently, "you will drive me wild with this perverse misinterpretation. If you will not believe me,

there is an end of it, no assertion of mine can have the least effect. But I will be heard for my own sake. Listen, and then take your choice. Although I have determined to break off these meetings, and your passionate and unreasonable conduct convinces me all the more of the propriety of doing so, I had not resolved to break our engagement. I would allow you to write freely, and promise to answer regularly; all I would ask is, that if secrecy is inevitable, that you would leave the country until this mystery may be cleared up. Remove from the neighbourhood, and the whispers about our intercourse will die away. Whenever circumstances allow you to come forward openly and claim me, do so; meantime be satisfied, without exposing me to slanderous misrepresentations. That is my proposal. The only alternative is to part for ever!"

"Leave you—withdraw—disappear—that you may be at liberty to pursue the conquest of Sir Thomas's heart. Say it at once, Miss

Moore ! why not ? be it so ! I resign you to him !”

“Repeat that insult once more, Monsieur Mentesi, and I take you at your word !” I exclaimed, indignantly. “I have a spirit, which, though forbearing and forgiving to a certain point, will not bend to every indignity. I am going. Our intercourse is at an end. Farewell !”

“No, no, no !” he exclaimed, catching my dress, “I am mad, I did not mean it, stay, listen to me, let me implore, forgive me ! in mercy, stay. Henrietta, must we part ?”

“Yes, we must ! but it is for you to choose whether we shall meet again !”

“Choose ! for me to choose ! can you doubt ! but dearest, sweetest, hear me. It is my failing perhaps, the infirmity of my nation, of my temper, to be madly jealous whilst my future happiness is so uncertain. But were you once mine—mine entirely—mine for ever—”

He stopped and looked at me earnestly. I did not catch his meaning.

“You mean to say it would cease? be it so. I forgive you all the past, but for your own sake I recommend you to subdue a temper which must make you miserable.”

“But, you do not understand. Henrietta, become mine, my wife without delay, and then I will no longer torment you, or myself by fears of a rival.”

His hurried manner, and embarrassed air, made his words not easy to understand. I was puzzled.

“What do you mean?” I exclaimed, quite bewildered. “Just now you said you could not own our engagement, and now you talk of marriage! You are strangely mysterious!”

“Not to have it known. I did not mean a public marriage, but a private, a concealed marriage; surely we could arrange it, and then I should fear no more.”

Every vein in my body seemed to tingle

with indignant contempt. I drew myself up in anger.

“A clandestine marriage! and you dare to propose this to *me*? Now, Monsieur, you have indeed shown me how I have degraded myself by consenting to meet you in private. Had I not condescended to do what nothing but confidence in your honour led me to grant, I had not been exposed to the insult of such a proposal. Take that, and farewell.”

I snatched from my finger the ring which he had placed there a week ago. I flung it indignantly at him, and I rushed away, without once pausing to look at, or to listen to his gestures and words of wild entreaty.

I have no memory of any thing which followed, until I found myself seated in the drawing room. My angry feelings so engrossed me, that I mechanically directed my steps there, without a moment's consideration. Yet, I believe, to outward appearance, I must have been calm, for Grace would have been

disturbed had my movements been more hurried than usual ; and she expressed no surprise. But I was conscious that St. John was looking at me earnestly, and I suppose my face was pale, for I felt sick at heart ; and after a little while St. John came to me silently, and placing a bottle of eau-de-cologne which stood on the table, within my reach, pressed my hand with a kind and brotherly action. There were only those two in the room with me, and his silent demonstrations of sympathy and friendship were not of a nature to attract my sister's attention.

I saw plainly that he was anxious to win my confidence, and in spite of my misery, feeling desirous of retaining his good opinion, I sought an early opportunity of giving him the information he wished for. I told him we were entirely parted ; that I had resolved never to see my lover again, for that M. Mentesi was not to be persuaded by any argument of mine, to declare openly his views and wishes in remaining in this neighbour-

hood. That I presumed he would now go away, but that at any rate, whether he went or stayed, I had decided on avoiding his society for the future.

St. John was most unaffectedly happy, and grateful at this communication. He expressed again and again, his conviction that I should hereafter see reason to rejoice in having broken off a dangerous acquaintance.

“Would to heaven I had never known them at all!” I exclaimed, in a burst of uncontrollable regret, and disappointment.

“I never thought it a wise acquaintance,” he answered, quietly; “but regret for the past will soon merge in peace of mind. You have done right now, and will certainly find it happiest.”

St. John did not know all. Theoretically no doubt, doing right ought to bring peace and quiet, but then it must be done from a right motive; the will must be in the deed, and mine was not. There is no peace to be found where even a correct action is deduced

from a false principle, and to do right with a wish that wrong may result, is no better than to do evil that good may come of it. In the whole transaction, I do not believe that I had one feeling which deserved to be called good ; I was swayed by pride, by passion, by affection, but not by principle. It was a miserable time that followed. Discontented, weary, wanting occupation, craving for excitement, regretting Theodore, I was a prey to unhappy thoughts and idle murmurs. Like all persons of an ill-regulated mind, I had been accustomed to give way to the vain amusement of indulging my imagination with ideal scenes of happiness, of which I was the heroine. I had pictured romances to my mind, until I hardly could live without these airy visions on which to feed my vanity. To these resources I now turned for distraction to my thoughts, and busied myself in building these unreal castles for the future. Theodore was always the hero and centre of my dream. Theodore returning, penitent, devoted, ex-

plaining all mysteries, clearing up his character, renouncing his country, and openly professing his adoption of our Protestant Church, whilst he honourably sought my hand in marriage. How proudly then should I bestow it, how gladly would I proclaim to all the world, my disinterested affection, and the entire confidence I felt in his worth. Such were my fancies; and in addition to this occupation, my only other diversion was flirting with Sir Thomas Fenton. His attentions were becoming every day more marked, and had my behaviour been more certainly encouraging, perhaps he would speedily have made his suit in due form. But I was capricious and variable, and sometimes so cold to his demonstrations, that it kept him in a state of suspense, exactly calculated to induce a man of his sanguine temper to pursue his object with the more resolution and animation.

There was no necessity for him to be in a hurry; he had no apparent rival, and he could

not expect, or even wish me, to marry before I attained the full possession of my estate.

Meanwhile, what had become of Theodore? This was a question which tormented me day and night. Apparently he had left the country ; certainly he had quitted his lodgings at Crowfoot Farm, and the inquiries which at my urgent request, St. John made, resulted in the information that he had sent off all his boxes by waggon to London, and was supposed to have gone there himself.

At first I could hardly believe this. It seemed to me impossible that he should have left me thus abruptly, without one effort at communication, one attempt to soften my resolution, or recall my tenderness. Every day I waked up expecting to have some note, some letter placed in my hand, imploring pardon, and beseeching for an interview ; every time I went out, I looked about in a sort of fearful longing to see some trace of him again ; to find him following my steps, or hiding in my old haunts.

I did not, indeed, go any where alone, I dared not do that; but I thought he would have been watching for the chance of seeing me. Every day I was disappointed, and the bitterness of my angry sorrow is not to be expressed: it was the more bitter, because I was so totally unable to give it vent. I had no one to speak to of what was nearest my heart.

I hardly remember how long this wretched state of mind continued; I was slightly roused by a proposal that we should go to London for a fortnight or three weeks. We were to meet Stuart and his wife there, and taking a house together, to form one family. Part of our plan was to get Grace's wedding clothes, part to indulge her with hearing the celebrated Catalani, whose voice excited just then the *furore* of the London world.

Sir Thomas indicated his intention to follow us, and I revived a little at the prospect of the novelty. The day of our departure was approaching, when one morning I received an

imploing message from Mrs. Simmons, the widow of the unfortunate poacher, begging me to come and see her, as one of her family was bad, and since Miss Dering was gone she had nobody to look to for comfort.

This woman had continued to live in her lonely hut in the wood, principally supported by an allowance that Edward made her, and helping herself also by selling baskets and brooms of her own manufacture round the country. We had naturally taken a great interest in her well-being, her hut had been improved, her children sent to school, and altogether she was much better off since her good-for-nothing husband's death.

It was so natural that she should send to us for help, that I had no hesitation in deciding to go there, and that afternoon for the first time ventured out in my pony carriage, with no other companion than my groom; not without a hope that I might, either in going or returning, fall in with Sir Thomas Fenton, whose road to Fairy Hill would be for some

distance the same as mine. I saw nothing of him as I went, and leaving the carriage in the lane, I crossed the stile to the cottage, and entered the door.

Mrs. Simmons came forwards to meet me, looking, I remember now, a little flurried. Another person was there also in the dress of a labouring man, but he had his back to the door and I could not see his face. The thought passed through my mind, as she placed herself between him and me that he was probably some rustic suitor, won by the annuity settled on the widow, whose presence she was ashamed to own.

"Our lodger, ma'am," she said hurriedly, "a poor man who begged shelter for the night, and was taken too bad to go on. It's my boy who is ill, please ma'am, but the naughty child has run out spite of all I says to him to keep quiet, and if you'll please stop abit I'll go and call him back. Sit down."

Before I could answer she quitted the house, and shut the door behind her. I moved a step

nearer the lodger and was going to speak to him, but he started up, threw off his hat and the wrappers in which he had been enveloped, and I was fairly caught. It was Theodore Mentesi !

I was indeed taken by surprise ; an idea of a trap had never occurred to me. I drew back and stepped towards the door, my impulse was to retreat, my promise to St. John was on my mind ; but he placed himself at once so firmly against it that I could not go, and my rebel heart was glad.

I was not breaking my promise, for I had no choice. I turned away, and moving to the little window stood there with my back to him, and my eyes fixed on the landscape. My bosom was heaving with violent emotion ; the glance which I had taken of his face had touched me deeply, he looked so ill, so altered, the change was terrible. Tears were swelling up under my eyelids, and I could hardly repress a sob.

He came up to me—I felt, though I did not

see, his movement. He stood by my side, he looked earnestly into my face, of which I could not conceal the profile. Silently he stood there watching me, he laid his hand close to mine where it rested on the window frame; he did not touch me or speak. The stillness was overpowering. I began to tremble from repressed emotion, and the tears already gathered on my eyelashes, increased in spite of my endeavours and rolled down my cheeks.

At last I could bear it no more; five minutes of this suspense made me long that he should speak, that he should indulge in any wild outburst rather than thus excite my already agitated feelings. I broke the spell by addressing him.

“Why this intrusion? What do you seek?”

“Are you the real, veritable Henrietta Moore,” said he at last, in a feeble voice, “have I the ineffable felicity of again seeing that beloved face, hearing that sweetest voice before I die! It is too—too much,” and

burying his face on his crossed arms, he shook with emotion from head to foot.

It was terrible to see, more terrible to bear. I did not know what to do.

"Theodore, you torture me!" I exclaimed passionately.

"Let me die now," he murmured again; "I have seen you weep, heard you call me by my name once more. Let me die now in peace. I forgive you, Henrietta—leave me!"

He *forgave* me, he said; I had thought it was I who was to forgive; yet when I gazed at him, and saw his worn look, his haggard face, it seemed to me that my conduct had been indeed barbarous and cruel.

I think there is some excuse to be made for me; I had not wilfully broken my promise in meeting him, and although I own that had I acted rightly at the beginning of our acquaintance, he would never have established such an influence over me, yet who will wonder that now, thrown together after

those days of weary misery, when I had been pining for the sight of him, I yielded once more to that influence? I cannot recall the whole of that interview; his love, his sorrow, his prayers, his remonstrances, his mingled entreaties and complaints, his melting tenderness, his passionate despair. If ever man was gifted with the fatal power of deluding and persuading at once, if ever human being resembled the fabled vampyre, in the strange lulling charm he exercised over fears and pains, it was Theodore Mentesi.

Had St. John Suffield stood on the other side of me to whisper his kind warnings, at that moment, I should have turned to him a heedless ear; had he been there to endeavour to draw me back, I should still have evaded his grasp, and given my hand to the tempter, who lured me on by his fascinations. Hints of danger and threats of unhappiness died from my memory; I only knew that when I parted we had alike been miserable, and it seemed to me therefore to matter little, to risk little,

when I resolved to unite our fates. I gave him a promise that in London I would become his wife.

One thing I said to try his love.

"Theodore, if I consent to this, do you know what you give up? If I marry before next year, half my income will revert to some distant cousin, and what remains will be hampered by the strictest settlements. Consider this!"

He crimsoned as I spoke; I imagined from being supposed to entertain mercenary views.

"Henrietta—" he paused, hesitated—"do you know who inherits this money when you marry?"

"I neither know, nor care. It will be their business to claim it; only we must behave well; and not let it be said that we made a secret marriage in hopes of retaining money to which we had no right. So soon as we reveal the fact, we renounce the income."

He did not look happy, there was a restless,

disturbed expression on his face which vexed me.

"Dear Theodore, do you regret giving up so much?" I asked, "we shall have enough left for every comfort."

"It is you that give up, not I," said he, with a sort of shudder.

"No, I have never yet had it; and if I cannot have you at a smaller cost, why let the fifteen hundred a year go its way, and welcome!"

"Oh, Henrietta, would to Heaven every farthing you possessed were sunk in the depths of the sea, rather than that you should be—" he stopped abruptly.

"That I should be what?" I enquired, wondering at his agitation.

"That you should suppose me mercenary, deceitful, treacherous. Dearest, I should have loved you as I do had you been as portionless as I am." He spoke with a frantic vehemence.

"I believe you," I answered, with the most entire reliance on his integrity.

"Oh yes, now ; but will you always believe it? Will you, hereafter, when time has disenchanted your eyes of the dear delusions of love ; when others asperse or condemn me ; when you learn to appreciate what you have sacrificed ; when you are irrevocably my wife, and find the real worth of what you have so dearly purchased ; will you then believe, in spite of suspicions, accusations, facts even, that I did love you for yourself, your own darling self, with a love independent of money, a love stronger than every other earthly tie which ever bound my heart?"

He held my hands in both of his, and looked me in the eyes.

"So far as I can promise for the future, Theodore—yes—always!"

A bright ray of pleasure shot over his face, he drew me closer and bent his head to mine,

when the cottage door suddenly opened, and Sir Thomas Fenton walked in.

He might well start, and stop abruptly at what he saw : our clasped hands, and the kiss which Theodore had all but pressed upon my forehead, could leave him in no doubt as to our feelings, whatever opinion it might create as to my character.

One moment he paused, then bowing, said,

“I beg your pardon, for intruding ; your servant told me you were here ; but I did not know you were engaged, or I would not—” he stopped, bowed again, and left the cottage. A moment after, we heard his horse’s feet upon the road.

Covered with confusion, vexed, and alarmed, I hardly knew what to do : but after an embarrassed silence, I prepared to go. Theodore hastily spoke, saying he would go to town immediately, and would write to me from thence ; that there we would meet again, and unite our fates for ever. It seemed to me, that he did not view this most inopportune

intrusion of the baronet in the same light which I did ; but then he had not to meet him again, and risk so much discomfort as I had.

It was not till after we had parted that I was struck with terror, when I thought that perhaps Sir Thomas might reveal what he had seen ; could I trust to his honor ? a man with whose affection I had been trifling, a man whose hopes I had encouraged only to disappoint him. Would he not be provoked into betraying me, if only from revenge for my levity ?

I concluded of course that he would not reappear at Fairy Hill that day ; but I was mistaken, he was there, walking about on the lawn with my father when I returned from my drive.

He even came up and helped me out of the carriage with perfect politeness, addressing me as if the interview in the cottage had not taken place. I was more humiliated by this conduct than by the unlucky accident itself ; for him so quietly to assume that what he

had witnessed was a secret, was worse than all the rest. My cheeks burnt throughout that evening to a degree that was almost insupportable. I believe to spectators there would have been no change apparent in Sir Thomas Fenton's manners, it was only to my quick apprehension that it was evident there was a change in his feelings. The little indescribable tokens of desire to please and anxiety for my opinion, were missing to my eye. He was evidently determined to withdraw his attentions without attracting observation; and this must have been for my sake.

I do not pretend to know what his feelings towards me were at any time, yet I cannot imagine that he entertained any very violent attachment; he wished to marry me, I believe. I was in every way a suitable match, and he liked me well enough to have made me happy.

The sudden discovery of his rival—for that he was a rival he could not doubt—dashed

down all these plans of course, but perhaps he was not so much in love as to be very angry. This was what I hoped. But I was in his power ; what could I do ?

I was standing at the window, looking out at the moonlight, when he came up close to me. Grace and St. John were singing, and my father engrossed by a book.

"It is a beautiful night," he said, "would you venture out into the veranda, or are you afraid ?"

"Not afraid of the air," I answered, in some confusion, and we walked out together.

"You need not be afraid of *me*, Miss Moore," he said, in a voice half proud, half friendly. "I wished to speak to you for one moment, just to assure you that there are circumstances under which I neither see, hear, nor remember. I give you my word of honour."

"Sir Thomas, if you knew—" I stammered.

"Excuse me, Miss Moore, I have neither wish nor claim to know more, but I am quite ready to take on trust that if I

did, I should—never mind; it is to be as if it were not. Only one thing let me say; no doubt you are quite aware who your companion was; I know something of the gentleman myself, as it happens, and can partly understand it. But do not trust to—to your *cousin's* magnanimity or disinterestedness. The sole possession of such a property is an object to a needy man—beware! I beg your pardon for the liberty I have taken, come in again.”

I followed him mechanically into the drawing-room. I was bewildered at his words. We had no more conversation, and I was not surprised when he said at parting that he should not probably see us until we met in London, as he must leave home for a few days.

CHAPTER II.

I charge you on your life
Believe not what she says, for she is mad,
And comes here not to die but to be healed.

THE GOLDEN LEGEND.

THE warnings of Sir Thomas were ringing in my ears all night. What could he mean? Of what cousin did he speak? He must have alluded in some way to the distant connection so nearly interested in my marriage, but in what manner his words applied I could not guess. It was strange that while Theodore Mentesi was giving me so convincing a proof of his entire disinterestedness and devotion, in preferring my hand at once to waiting for additional pecuniary advantages, all those who

suspected our mutual interest instantly uttered hints as to mercenary motives, or dark allusions of danger to me.

I thought it was the strong effect of prejudice upon the thoroughly English minds of these three men, Captain Ormond, St. John, and Sir Thomas, which made them immediately jump to the conclusion that a foreigner, and an Italian, must be a deceitful or suspicious personage. I knew Theodore better, I thought, and heeded not the voice of warning uttered either by friend or lover.

We moved to London. In a house in the immediate vicinity of Kensington Gardens we found Stuart and Marianne comfortably established, and here we also took up our quarters.

At the time, I thought this a happy arrangement; the gardens afforded a spot perfectly safe and accessible for a rendezvous, and I had not been in London a week before I had established the custom of taking a walk

there alone every morning, before our late and irregular breakfast.

Our evenings were mostly engaged. Marianne and Stuart had a large acquaintance, and went out a great deal. Grace and my father stayed at home with St. John, who was a constant visitor, Edward, who came most afternoons, and Marianne's eldest sister, who called herself *serious*, and did not go out. Edward had not recovered his spirits, but Miss Elson was very kind to him, and took great pains to interest herself in his studies, or excite him to concern himself for her pursuits.

Amongst the many acquaintance, and, of course, admirers, by whom as a beauty and heiress I was surrounded, Sir Thomas Fenton was present generally; and certainly was the most eligible and agreeable of the whole circle. Marianne, professedly a match-maker, was extremely pleased with him, and most anxious to throw him with me as much as possible.

Nothing could be more quiet and unemonstrative than his behaviour in general society, and yet there was something about it, which showed more interest in me than I deserved. I was shy and uncomfortable enough in his presence; ashamed to meet the man who had my secret in his power, and who had laid me under an obligation so very unwelcome. I believe my sister-in-law thought this shyness arose from conscious affection, and, to give me courage, used to extort from him praises of me, which she repeated for my gratification. At last, one day, (we had been about ten days in London,) she asked me laughingly, if during my solitary walks in Kensington Gardens, I had never encountered Sir Thomas Fenton?

"No, I had never seen him. Why?"

"Then he is more dull than I fancied," said she, "for I hinted to him that you were in the habit of walking early, and I certainly wished him to take advantage of the knowledge. I fancied he would meet you."

I was too much overwhelmed with confusion to be able to reproach my sister-in-law as she deserved. If I had met Sir Thomas there ! if he had seen me ! but who could tell me that he had not : might not curiosity have brought him across my path, though engrossed by my companion, I had not observed him. What would he think of me ?

We met at a ball that night, and I had to dance with him ; I hardly dared encounter his eyes, and feared every time he opened his mouth he would make some allusion to early hours, or Kensington gardens.

No word of the kind, however, passed his lips, although, (it might be only my fancy) he was graver than usual.

The crisis of my fate was approaching, a very few more days, and I should have spoken the irrevocable words which bound me to Theodore Mentesi for life. I was excited, agitated, trying to drown the reproaches of conscience, and the regrets of ambition, in the flattering hopes of gratified love, or the still

more ready resource of immediate dissipation. Our plan was very simple, and easily put in practice. I was to go out one morning, to meet him at a neighbouring Church, and there we were to be married, then, whilst I returned home without delay myself, he was instantly to leave London, and proceed to Paris, where some business, the nature of which he did not attempt to explain to me, but which I understood to be political, would detain him perhaps for a few weeks. On his return, he flattered himself that he would be free from all the engagements which now hampered him, and would be able to claim me as his wife, without risk to his mother, or his brother-patriots.

Farther than this I dared not look. I was about to take a desperate plunge, and beyond the immediate range of my vision, all was dark, uncertain, or shifting like a landscape in a fog. Theodore insisted on it that to marry me, was the only effectual way to cut the various embarrassing intrigues in which he

was involved; and I, led by his eloquence and my self-will, consented.

It was not the fashion of those days for weddings to be the grand and gorgeous things they now are. Nobody, except the very highest in the land, thought of inviting every acquaintance, crowding their rooms, and getting up the whole affair with the same regard to effect and show, that they would a theatrical performance. In consenting to a clandestine marriage, I yielded a great deal, but not those dear delights to the vanity of brides, which I suspect have often no small share in deluding girls into hasty wedlock. Modern young ladies need not pity my mortification at foregoing twelve bridesmaids, a Honiton lace veil and a magnificent *déjeuné*. Hardly, even had I married Sir Thomas Fenton, should I have enjoyed the splendours which now await every apothecary's or attorney's daughter or niece.

I had misery of mind enough without any part springing from the regrets of disap-

pointed vanity. I was extremely unhappy. Fear, shame, and hesitation were my companions day and night; only when with Theodore could I still the voice of conscience, and drown the remonstrances of my better self, the pleadings of honour and decorum. I hoped to do so sometimes in society, but flattery and triumph won by my beauty seemed reproaches for my deceit; even the quiet attentions of Sir Thomas pained me; whilst St. John's kind brotherly behaviour drove me almost mad.

I believe I may say that for the few days interposing between the time when our marriage was finally settled, and the morning when it was to take place, I rested neither day nor night; my sleep was broken and unrefreshing, my waking hours a prey to remorse. Words of kindness tortured me, and I sometimes longed wildly to confess all aloud, and bid them all despise me as I deserved. As I stood by Sir Thomas in the dance, I was engrossed, whilst apparently listening to him, in con-

sidering what would be the feelings, the expressions, the sneers, the contempt of the surrounding crowd could they learn that the proud and beautiful Henrietta Moore had pledged herself to stoop to a clandestine marriage with an exiled and portionless foreigner. How would my partner have dropped my hand in indignation could he have understood the life of deceit which for many days I had been leading !

Morning after morning when I met Theodore in the gardens, I had resolved to tell him it could not be as we had planned ; that my courage had failed, that I would not thus deceive my family ; and yet each morning, when my hand was clasped in his, I lost the power to speak, my resolution melted at his smile, and I became again the willing sacrifice to his necessities.

One part of our arrangements had been a puzzle to me. I had no female friend to accompany me : not a creature to whom I could trust my secret ; and to go alone, quite alone

to Church really seemed to me so shocking that I shrank from it. To obviate this difficulty, Theodore offered to introduce me to some friends of his, whom he could trust, but only two days before our marriage he had taken no measures to do so. I am not sure that I wished this introduction. I did not intend to adopt Theodore's friends; refugees as they probably were, might they not draw us down into a lower sphere? My idea was of raising my husband into my own circle, not sinking into the one he had hitherto occupied. Our fortune, so much reduced from what I had always expected to enjoy, would not suffice to support all the bearded and moustached patriots, who, with shabby coats and slender resources, might, perhaps, hope to rise by means of their countryman's good fortune.

These ideas had never entered my head in the country; but in London, mixing in society, and hearing a good deal of political discussion from the circle in which we moved, I discovered that Theodore was not the only

Italian, exile or otherwise, whom the recent revolutions in his country had brought to England; and I learnt, by a little careful listening and judicious questioning, that there were those of his party and persuasion, whom it would be as well to avoid.

I am not sure St. John did not throw this information in my way that I might form a more just appreciation of the evils of incautious intimacy with foreigners. If he did, it was too late.

But the day before that appointed for our marriage, Theodore met me, not alone; a lady in a close bonnet and thick veil was standing conversing with him, under the tree which was our trysting place. He advanced eagerly to meet me, and taking my hand he said—

“Henrietta, will you, can you forgive a momentary fit of passion, and receive again your penitent, and still most loving friend, Caterina?”

I started, and half drew back. The re-

membrance of our last scene, and the strong dislike I had taken to her after that, came over me, and I hesitated.

But Caterina rushed forward, threw up her veil, and gave me no time for retreat. She was in the midst of an eloquent, and vehemently Italian outburst of remorse, gratitude, love, esteem, and fifty other superlative emotions, before I had recovered my surprise. She was ashamed to have doubted me, now that I had shown my noble, generous sincerity, my disinterested love, how could she thank me enough, how could she ever express all her penitence for the unkind reproaches she had heaped on me.

She knew that I should forgive her ; that I should pardon the wild, impulsive, unchecked Italian heart, and whilst she welcomed me as a sister, I would, she trusted, allow her to be present to-morrow to see me really become such.

I inquired for her mother ; but she said little regarding her. Madame Mentesi, I

knew from Theodore, had taken his change of religion grievously to heart, and the daughter even was less inclined to be communicative about her, than the son. She would not oppose Caterina's wish of being present to-morrow, they said, but nothing should persuade her to sanction with her presence, an act of what she could not regard otherwise than as sacrilege and profanity. Her maternal feelings were at war with her religious ones; but Caterina, evidently much less distressed at her opposition than Theodore had been, promised us to use her utmost efforts to reconcile her to the change. Mademoiselle Mentesi's own theory seemed to be, what cannot be cured must be endured, and since her brother was resolved to become my Protestant husband, the best thing to be done was to bear it with a good grace.

I had to go to a large party that very evening; and again to meet Sir Thomas Fenton. To my surprise he asked if I should be disengaged the next morning at twelve

o'clock, and if he might call on me then. I was so embarrassed and frightened, for in my nervous excitement everything frightened me, that I said I did not know.

Marianne, who was close to me, interfered, and answered that she was sure he might call, and she would take care he should be received; laughingly saying she would get up early herself and see about it. He thanked her, and I did not dare to contradict.

Even at this distance of time my heart palpitates, and my hand grows unsteady, when I recall the events of the day which followed. Oh, the misery of my own acts! But I will try to be calm.

At nine o'clock, as agreed on, I was ready in my room, when word was brought to me that a young lady had called by appointment to walk with me. I started up, and gasping for breath, hastily ran down stairs, fearful to-day, even of doing what was almost a daily act with me, going out alone, lest my motive should be suspected.

Caterina was waiting for me, and drawing my trembling hand under her arm, without a word she hurried me away. There was a gleam of triumph in her eyes, a resolute expression about her mouth, a determination in the grasp she laid on me, which was more like the tyrant carrying off a victim than a loving friend giving support in an hour of emotion. She led me to a hackney-coach which was drawn up round the next corner, and on the door being opened she assisted me in. Her Italian servant was there also. She gave no orders, but the coachman drove off, and in about five minutes we stopped at the portico of a church.

Theodore came forward, assisted us all to alight, and, clasping my hand with fond and eager tenacity, he led me into the church. The others followed. I was cold, passive, indifferent; all emotion had gone, and with it all thought and feeling. I hardly recognised that it was any concern of mine that brought us there; I moved as one does in a dream,

with a dim expectation of waking presently, and finding it all unreal.

There was some delay on our arrival. Another couple were undergoing the matrimonial ceremony, and we had to stand aside until they were dismissed to wedded happiness. I was not sorry; I expected now that something would interfere, and that we should find our whole scheme a failure. I wished it, I believe, so far as I wished anything.

I daresay I looked miserably white and sick. Caterina seemed uneasy, and handed me aromatic vinegar, whilst Theodore stood squeezing my hand, and biting his lip with vexation at the delay. I was the quietest of the party; but I heard every throb of my heart, as its pulsations told the passing seconds. There was somebody else, a gentleman with a large beard, whose name Theodore had murmured to me, who belonged to our party; but he seemed engrossed by some mural tablets, and I hardly saw him.

The delay was over at last, and then we were called forward. We took our places—the service began, proceeded, finished—the promises were made, the union pronounced indissoluble—I was Theodore's wife! The passionate kiss—now his unquestionable right—with which he claimed me, roused me from my stupor to a sense of what I had done; and a feeling that I would have given all the world to recall the act, and cancel my rash vows, came over me too late.

An exclamation, half suppressed, as we turned away from the chancel and were about to repair to the vestry to sign the register, startled me and made me look up. Face to face with us stood Sir Thomas Fenton!

By what inauspicious accident he chanced at that hour to enter that church, I do not know, but the sight of him overwhelmed me. I did not utter a sound, my voice was gone; I did not faint, for I saw and heard everything passing before me; I could not weep, I could not move; rigid and powerless I sank upon a

bench beside me, and remained mute and passive.

My husband looked from the intruder to me; anxiety for my sake was mingled in his face with a glance of proud triumph, as he gazed at the rival he no longer had to fear. Caterina sprang forwards and planted herself beside me. I saw it all, and read their looks and marked their actions well. Sir Thomas hesitated, and then seemed about to speak. Theodore interposed.

“Sir Thomas, this lady is my wife; may I hope that your future intercourse with her will be limited to such terms as suits her new position.”

“Your wife!” he repeated; “and have you really succeeded. Of course she knows—”

Theodore drew him hastily aside. There was a considerable whispering between them. I heard the words “honour, confidence,” and other emphatic expressions in my husband’s voice. Sir Thomas seemed arguing; I heard

the name of Mr. Grey more than once repeated. I could not understand what they were about. Caterina stood watching like a wild cat, as the gentlemen whispered.

The clergyman grew impatient, and sent to ask the parties to sign the register. This broke up the conference; they came to me. Theodore gave me his arm, and mechanically I rose.

Sir Thomas said, in a quiet way :—

“I had no idea of meeting you here; my entrance was accidental; I really ought to apologise.”

I could say nothing.

Theodore signed the book, gave me the pen, and, pointing to the spot where I was to write my name, held his fingers in such a way that I could not see his signature. With trembling hands I wrote. Caterina, and the Italian maid, “Elena Brossa,” signed also. Then Sir Thomas looked at the book, called Theodore back, whispered another remonstrance,

and as Caterina led me away, I did not see the end. In a minute my husband returned to me, and said in Italian:—

“I always told you all jealousy would cease, dearest, as soon as you were really mine; now let me prove it. I have explained to your good friend, Sir Thomas, what our next step must be; he has offered to see you safe home. I trust you to him entirely. Heaven only knows when we shall meet again; but here, where you have given me your hand, we must part.”

“I am to take charge of Mrs. —” he was interrupted quickly by Caterina.

“Of Madame Mentesi,” she said pointedly.

“My brother owns no other name.”

“And do you quite drop your English patronymic?” said Sir Thomas; “others beside myself will remember your father. Does your bride prefer the Italian to the British designation?”

“Sir Thomas, I know Monsieur Mentesi by no other name than that, and let me at least

reward his confidence by learning the English designation from himself alone." I roused myself to say this, and the gratitude of my husband was my reward.

Sir Thomas looked extremely dissatisfied, but I could not attend to him.

We parted, Theodore and I, just declared husband and wife, we parted in the church porch. My companion attended me into the coach, which was still waiting, and Caterina and her servant accompanied us. Not a word was spoken by either, until we reached the corner where we had to alight. Then Caterina bade me a hasty farewell, and a moment after I stood alone with Sir Thomas in the street. The clocks were striking ten at that moment. Just one hour since I had left my home, and now how my fate was changed! With a bitter sigh I moved on, leaning on his arm.

I did not know what Theodore had said or explained; I wanted to speak, I hesitated, I said at last:—

"Sir Thomas, I am still Miss Moore to the world."

"So much the worse for the world," he said, coolly.

"Accident has put you in possession of our secret," I added.

"Yes, and I hope it is in no danger of being any less a secret for me. If my knowledge and its consequences were the worst result of your morning's adventure, you, I trust, would have little reason to repent. Yet, if I might say so, I am sorry at least that secresy is necessary."

"Of that you are no judge," I answered hastily.

"True; but of some of the difficulties and vexations you have prepared for yourself I can guess. However, never mind my forebodings; since I was just a quarter of an hour too late at that church, I will be silent now; but had I stepped in at the other end of the service, no power of his subtle tongue should have stopped my mouth."

I longed, yet I was ashamed to ask him for the information as to Theodore's paternal name and family, of which I was as yet profoundly ignorant. I was silent, and no more was said by either until on the steps; as we parted, he pressed my hand gravely, whispering as he did so:

"For your sake, I will be near you still when we meet in society. Since you are a wife, let me be your friend henceforth."

I went up to my room, drew off my wedding ring, thought of the old superstition that some great misfortune ensues the first time it is taken from the finger; then enclosing it in a gold locket which I happened to possess, I hung it to my watch chain, resolved to hide it there till I was privileged to wear it as I ought. Grace came in whilst I was doing this, but her presence did not interfere with my arrangements, and I exerted myself to talk gaily of our last night's party, in order to avoid any questioning regarding my morning's walk.

My mind was in a tumult, and the intense excitement, fatigue, and anxiety I had undergone lately told also on my body. My hands were burning, my blood seemed tingling in my veins ; my whole nervous system thrilling at the least word, as a harp vibrates when other chords are struck near it. Hot and cold fits passed over me, and at times my eyes grew so dizzy that I could scarcely distinguish anything. My impulse one moment was to talk, fearing lest silence should excite wonder; the next five minutes perhaps I was sunk in a profound reverie, entirely unconscious of what was passing amongst the others.

Marianne laughed when I did not hear what she said to me, and archly accused me of thinking of some of my last night's partners. Would that I had had nothing worse to dwell on.

Stuart proposed my going with him that forenoon to see some exhibition which I had expressed a wish to visit. He was engaged in the afternoon, but he said if I could start

about twelve he would be happy to escort me.

I was about to accept it, when Marianne interposed :

“ It is quite impossible, Stuart ; Henrietta has an engagement at twelve o'clock, which she must not break, or I would not answer for the consequences. I will take her in the afternoon, and perhaps we may get an escort from some acquaintance.”

Stuart acquiesced, with a slight expression of wonder that I did not recollect my engagements. Marianne laughed again, significantly, saying there were some engagements young ladies seemed to forget, for the sake of appearances ; luckily, their friends were not obliged to lose their memories also. I was annoyed, but I could say nothing. I knew very well that Sir Thomas would not call that day, nor the next either, for the purpose Marianne supposed ; but I dared not say so. It would have been easy indeed to have told her we had met out walking, but I feared to say anything,

and left it all to take its own course, well knowing how she would wonder when she found he failed in his engagement, and yet wishing to avoid all explanation.

When we went to the drawing room after breakfast, she told me she should order my visitor to be shown into the library, that I might not be interrupted.

"Who is your mysterious visitor?" inquired Grace.

"I do not expect anyone," was my reply, colouring however with a feeling of guilt and shame, as I remembered the good reason I had for my opinion.

"Oh no, of course not," said Marianne. "But, Grace, if a gentleman asked permission to call on you at twelve o'clock, should *you* not expect him?"

"It would depend upon whether I gave him the permission or not," laughed Grace. "Perhaps Henrietta whispered a quiet negative unknown to you."

"We shall see," replied my sister-in-law,

decisively. "I authorized his coming at all events."

For my part, I only wished the appointed hour to come and go, that she might see the futility of her expectations, although even then I should have to parry her curiosity and wonder as well as I could. Explanation, however, I would leave to Sir Thomas himself; my best plan, I imagined, was to profess entire ignorance on the whole topic; although I did venture to say to her :

"Marianne, one thing I think you had better know. Whatever Sir Thomas Fenton's motive for wishing to see me might be, I do not from his manner at all imagine it was what I know you fancy. We are very good friends, but nothing more, and I rather think his object related to some questions I had been asking about a totally different subject."

"We shall see," she repeated.

Twelve o'clock came, and no news of the Baronet was brought. Marianne grew fidgetty, and worried me till in my state of

nervous excitement I could hardly bear it. A quarter, half an hour passed, and still he did not appear, but at length her anxiety was rewarded by a loud rap at the door.

"There!" was her exclamation.

"That is not Sir Thomas Fenton," said Grace.

I thought with her, and tried vainly to quiet my fluttered heart, and tell myself there was nothing to fear. I bent down my head to conceal my extreme excitement. Why should I connect every event and every sound with the deed of the morning; why should every voice make me start, every word alarm me, every advancing footfall seem to be the forerunner of some important announcement?

We waited a few minutes, and then the footman announced that a gentleman wished to see Miss Moore in the library.

Marianne's eyes said, "There, I told you so;" her tongue answered discreetly, for mine was silent, "Very well, Miss Moore will come directly."

The servant left the room. My sister-in-law came up to me, and said in a low voice :

“ You will really see him, will you not ? you look terribly fluttered ; but you know, my dear, these sort of forms are only terrible just at first. When once you are seated together in the library, the rest will come so naturally you will wonder you were frightened.”

She spoke with all the airs that married women ever assume of despising the reluctant coyness of a girl regarding her first lover, as if she, having gone through the ordeal so often, was quite qualified to give advice. She little knew the reason why I reluctantly laid down my embroidery, and mechanically drew on my gloves, with a feeling of despair.

She smoothed my hair with a patronising kindness, settled my pelerine and neck-tie, and then pronouncing that I was quite the thing, and reminding me to take my reticule and vinaigrette, she dismissed me with a consequential air, as if it were all her doing that

a baronet of large fortune was waiting to request my hand.

I went downstairs slowly, leaning on the balustrade; I trembled, I was sick, my eyes were dim and my head dizzy. I reached the library door, I stopped; I heard heavy steps pacing up and down; that was not the elastic tread of Sir Thomas Fenton; it was a firm determined footfall which I did not recognise. Who could it be? Strange thoughts about the claimant to the property I was to renounce passed through my mind; the idea of my marriage so possessed me that all the world seemed in some way to lead to the same subject. It was no use lingering, the step must be taken. I opened the door, advanced into the room with an air of assumed haughtiness, and found myself accosted by Captain Ormond.

CHAPTER III.

"It is decided! For many days
And nights as many we have had,
A nameless terror in our breast,
Making us timid and afraid."

THE GOLDEN LEGEND.

I CONFESS I was taken completely by surprise. I had not in the least expected to see Captain Ormond, and the sudden relief to my feelings on finding that it was nobody worse, made me, no doubt, look more pleased in meeting him, than I had ever done before. His reception of me was warm and glad; he pressed my hand with an earnestness, not required by good manners alone, and looking in my face, flushed with the glow of surprise and the fever of excitement, exclaimed:

"Thank heaven, I see you again, and see you so well too! I am *so* glad of it, Miss Moore."

"You are very good," said I, trying to release my hand from the vice-like grasp of his large strong fingers. "Do not excite yourself so. Really, Captain Ormond, your energy will wear you out before your time. Will you not sit down?"

I pointed to a chair and placed myself on another.

"Miss Moore, I have travelled day and night to return to you; thank heaven, I am in time!"

He really, I perceived now, looked worn and wearied, and a remembrance of all that had passed at our last meeting flashing across me, I began to tremble, I hardly knew at what. But I spoke in my usual light, jesting way.

"You need not have hurried. We have settled to remain in London another week."

"I did not know you were in town," he

answered, "and went to Leatherham first, in consequence. I was sadly afraid the delay might have been fatal."

"I have not the pleasure of understanding you, Captain Ormond," was my reply.

"I heard whilst I was abroad, Miss Moore, that you were likely to be married immediately. That hurried me home," he said, rather bluntly.

"Oh! indeed, why? to be present. I am sorry I cannot oblige you; but I am quite unlikely to be married, so you see your haste was, as I tell you, unnecessary excitement, and waste of energy."

"Miss Moore," drawing his chair close to mine, and looking in my eyes; speaking in a serious voice, "are you quite sincere! Have you really no intention of marrying at present?"

"Your question is a little out of order, Captain Ormond, but I do not mind assuring you, although I deny your right to ask, that I have no such intentions at all."

I tried to look innocent and unconcerned, but I felt my face and neck must be crimson.

"Has it been broken off then?" asked he, abruptly.

"Allow me to observe that your question is, to say the least, impertinent."

"No, no: you promised not to be angry; and to let me speak out. I heard you were engaged to a deceitful villain, and knowing him to be such I hastened home to save you."

The blood went back to my heart. Captain Ormond had gone abroad on purpose to find out who Theodore was; and was this the result of his investigations? He was watching me narrowly.

"I alarm you; you turn pale; but I do not wish to make you uneasy; if you are not engaged all will soon be put right."

"Be explicit, Captain Ormond," said I, impatiently; "to whom did you believe me engaged?"

"To Theodore Mentesi!"

“And then! you deal in hard names; why do you call him a villain?”

“Because I believe him such. And that little vixen, Caterina, is worse.

“I cannot allow this,” pushing back my chair with decision. I was about to rise, but he placed his hand on my arm, and made me remain.

“I will not abuse either of them, on my honor, I will not; if you will only sit still. I will tell you all. Do you know who Monsieur Mentesi’s father was, yet? was that the reason why you broke with him?”

“No—tell me!” I gasped out the words. Surely there was some terrible mystery involved in this unknown English parent; repudiated by the mother, concealed by the children, hinted at in terms of vague suspicion by Sir Thomas, and now spoken of by Captain Ormond, as if to know who he was, would at once insure my detestation.

“I will tell you my story in regular order,

Miss Moore. But do not look so frightened. Really there is no harm if you are not engaged to Theodore Mentesi ; and even if you were, a little patience would make all right ; so do not be frightened."

I gathered up my courage as well as I could, and set myself to hear as one would to undergo some painful operation. To conceal from Captain Ormond my secret, and learn at once what Sir Thomas, knowing it, had declined to tell me, was now my object. Any certainty was better than this suspense, and I rushed on, resolved to hear and bear all. Captain Ormond settled himself in his chair, and began :

"After you introduced me to Mademoiselle Mentesi, I often met her out walking and we used to talk of you a good deal. I don't know her object in saying what she did ; sometimes I thought it was the mere love of tormenting, sometimes with a kind intention of opening my eyes to the delusive nature of certain hopes I entertained ; but at all events she used to

repeat things to me laughingly, with little prefaces such as 'I know you will not mind,' or 'you are too wise to care,' or something of the kind, things you had said of me, which whilst they showed me, Miss Moore, how I had mistaken your feelings, showed me also, how little the young lady was to be trusted. I will not say I was not sometimes hurt. I am only a man, and though not a very vain one, I hope, I do not like to be laughed at, and you were not always merciful, if what she said was true. But it does not matter now. I don't want to make you uncomfortable. The result of our many conversations was that I gradually discovered that Caterina wanted you to marry in your minority; that she had an interest in it, and then that she wanted you to marry her brother. I could not make it out, she used to vary so in her stories; but I felt sure that she knew the heir to whom your money would devolve in case you married. Did she tell you this?"

I shook my head. Confused, wild imagina-

tions passed through my mind, but I could form no distinct ideas; my head was aching violently from the varied excitements of the day, and I only wanted him to go on, and leave me in peace.

“Well, resolved to fathom this mystery, and having got hints from Caterina which she never dreamt would help me, if you remember, I started for Italy, and went to Milan. I wanted to make you promise not to go on with an acquaintance which I thought dangerous. You would not. I got hold of a priest at Milan who knew all about the Mentesis, but it was a good while before I could extract from him the information I wanted. However, I found at last that it was exactly what I suspected all along.”

“And what was that?” I exclaimed, in a tone that startled him.

“Just this, Miss Moore. Their father, who is dead, was the identical Mr. Grey to whom half your property would pass in event of

marriage, and the brother and sister are his heirs."

I believe I started upright as he spoke, and exclaimed, in an ecstasy of injured feelings :

"Impossible! He cannot—Theodore cannot be such a traitor!"

All the past rushed into my mind as I spoke. The wiles of Caterina, the hesitation and wretchedness of Theodore, his haste to secure a marriage, his dread of being questioned, the hints of Sir Thomas, the triumph of the sister when the affair was complete; all seemed to present themselves in a new light, and stamp themselves on my brain as truth.

Was I then the victim of a base plot—a conspiracy to rob me of my property for their benefit? Had these two artful Italians been working on my feelings, one by winning my love, the other by exciting my anger, merely for their own mercenary ends? Had I been sacrificed to an imaginary attachment, only to enrich my betrayers and tempters?

The thought was maddening. My excited feelings seemed hardly capable of enduring more. The acute pain in my head, which made every motion torture, was inferior to the agony of my mind, for every thought was an inexpressible pang.

Captain Ormond was evidently frightened at the effect of his revelation. I can at this moment distinctly remember his pale face of concern and fear. Indeed, every word and look of that interview are still stamped on my memory with a vividness which will endure through life. I have forgotten many emotions, but I never can forget the misery of discovering that I had given my hand and faith to a deceiver and a traitor. Oh, to call back the deed of that fatal morning!

My companion tried in his abrupt and unskilful way to soothe my feelings.

"Don't, please don't, Miss Moore, don't look so dreadful. It is quite true, I assure you, and I am sorry to say what gives you pain; but indeed you must not give way so.

Monsieur Mentesi is not worth caring for, not *your* caring for, at least. You must forget him, and you will soon find somebody else, so rich and beautiful as you are. Dear Miss Moore, you despise *me*, but I would lay down my life to save you from this pain."

"Hush, Captain Ormond. Tell me, are you certain that this is true?"

I stood before him, and laid my hand on his arm, to arrest his attention. He took it in his.

"As true as that I now hold your hand in mine. They came over to England merely to see what chance they had of securing their share of the estate. For this they took Laurel Cottage, and waited and watched, peeped and listened, until they got hold of you. For this they lived so retired, and refused all other introductions, always fearing lest they should meet with some one who had known their father, and should reveal their name. The whole thing was a plot from beginning to end; and I have some idea that it goes

even deeper than this. I fancy the priest has political connections at home, who supported them all, in the hopes of winning this money. I am certain he is one of the Carbonari, or of some secret society, and could they have succeeded in their plot, his share of the prize would probably have gone to support the partisans of his cause. I learnt, at Milan, from my friend the priest there, who thought I was in love with Caterina, that you were on the eve of marriage with this man, who had abjured his vows; and on learning this, I rushed home, passing through London two days ago, little dreaming that you were here. I went to Leatherham, and then had to come back—”

I heard no more. I believe he went on speaking; there was a murmur in my ears for some moments, and then pain rendered me insensible.

Captain Ormond's hurried ringing of the bell, and calls for help, when I dropped down before him, quickly brought Marianne

and her sister to see what was wanted, and the surprise of the former, at discovering who the visitor really was, was as great as her disappointment. To see Captain Ormond supporting me in his arms, instead of Sir Thomas Fenton, was almost a worse and more distressing spectacle than to see me white and lifeless.

The fit was so long and obstinate, that they sent for a doctor, who discovered that it was not a mere attack of ordinary fainting, but something much more serious. I was carried from the library, by poor Captain Ormond, whose distress at the effect of his communication was extreme, and taken to my room, where I was placed in bed, and properly treated. A raging fever ensued, and for some days the whole family were in great alarm for me.

Delirium and fever subsided by degrees, and slowly a consciousness of where I was, and a recognition of those around me came back to me. It was too much trouble to speak

or think, but I lay lazily watching the persons who came to me, and wondering why I was there, and what made it so difficult for me to move. For several days I could remember nothing that had passed, and all vexatious thoughts seemed floated away into an immense distance. I recollect I used to be most taken up in an endeavour to ascertain whether my hands were really mine, and if so what made them so thin and feeble.

By imperceptible degrees, memory came back. But I could not determine whether what I seemed to remember were really events that had happened, or mental delusions of the fever. Vague, indistinct fancies of horrible things so haunted my imagination that I could not distinguish truth from dreams of illness. I had always an idea all through my attack that Theodore was near me, and when I began to recover enough to look about, I often watched, when the curtain was moved, or gazed round the room on every opportunity, to see if I could discover him.

Of course this was only a delusion, arising from a distorted view of the fact that we were now indissolubly connected.

As I began to reason more accurately, I saw my mistake, but was unable entirely to determine whether it was also a sick fancy, that we were bound to one another in some unknown way. All at once the scene at church flashed on my mind, and I began to question whether this too had been merely a fever-dream. I recalled it all. I felt in imagination the ring again put on my finger; I saw again the grave face of Sir Thomas Fenton, and the passionate vehemence of Caterina; but all these figures had so haunted my feverish hours, that even now I could not tell whether this had been fact, or delusion. The ring was not now on my finger, and I could not remember removing it; and the whole of that morning's scene, seemed now to me so monstrously unreal and improbable, that I could not look on it for some time as other than a dream.

But as strength slowly returned and other sick-fancies died away, this only stood out more strongly and distinctly. The longer I thought, the more real it became. I even remembered the name of the church and street where this scene had occurred.

I tortured my memory by the wearisome efforts which I made to settle this point, and often I believe my companions fancied it was pain of body which wrung from me sighs, really occasioned by mental perplexity. At length I determined to satisfy myself.

I was pronounced well enough to see my friends if I pleased, and though the idea of speaking to most people was abhorrent to me, I did wish to see St. John. He came accordingly, and insisting on having a private conversation with him, I immediately seized the opportunity to ask if anybody had an idea of the cause of my recent illness.

St. John hesitated a little, but I told him that it would not, could not do me harm to hear, for that I was perplexed by some fancies

which the truth would either clear away or confirm, and until my mind was quite right on these points, I did not think that I could get well. He then owned that the immediate cause of my illness was unknown; Captain Ormond was conversing with me at the time, but as there was nothing particular that they knew of to excite me, they supposed that I had been over-tired and excited, both mentally and bodily.

This threw no light on what I wanted to know, except that it first brought back distinctly to my mind what Captain Ormond had come to communicate. I recollected for the first time, that interview, and the purport of it.

"You do not know," said I anxiously, "what passed between Captain Ormond and me?"

"No, he never told us."

I paused and considered. Thought made my blood flow quicker, and brought the hot fever spot to my cheeks. St. John saw it, and urged me to be quiet.

"Indeed, Henrietta, I must intreat you not to talk of this, it excites you so," he said.

"If I do not talk I shall think, and thought will drive me mad," I answered vehemently.

He started, and then tried to hide his anxiety, by smilingly observing, I was as impetuous as ever.

"Have pity on me, St. John," I said, more quietly, "and if I tell you of my weakness, my errors, do not despise and forsake me."

Tears filled my eyes. He took my hand and kissed it affectionately.

"Dear Henrietta, you may trust to me," was all he said.

"Then, St. John, go to ——— Church, and look in the register, and see—stay ; what day was I taken ill?"

He told me the day.

"See then, on that day, what is entered there. The marriage register!"

St. John looked exceedingly surprised and made no answer.

"Go," I repeated imploringly, "you said I might trust you."

"By and bye," said he, evidently thinking me wandering.

"Go at once, St. John, I shall have no peace until you do. See if there is not a name we both know entered there on that day."

His countenance changed: evidently he had not a suspicion of the truth; but a new light seemed to break on his mind.

"Is it the marriage of one about whom we have spoken, Henrietta," he asked in a low voice.

"Don't, don't utter his name," I exclaimed, "but do as I ask, and come back to me."

He went, and was absent, I believe, several hours. Fortunately I was arrived at that state of convalescence when if excitement caused fatigue, fatigue also brought rest. It is a mercy when we are strong enough or weak enough to sleep. I passed the time in a

profound repose, sinking into unconsciousness with a sort of undefined feeling that I was safer and happier now that I had taken the first step towards confiding in St. John. He at least was real and true in all he said and did, and there was rest and peace in trusting him. But when I awoke, it all came back to me. Memory suddenly resumed her entire dominion, and ere Mr. Suffield saw me again I was perfectly aware of what in the past was truth, and what was imaginary. I cannot pretend to account for the freaks of memory, or the curious phenomena of the brain. Probably no one can; but certain it is, that my mind, before so wavering and unsteady, suddenly regained its powers of recalling, considering, reflecting, and concluding as truly as previous to my illness.

The marriage ceremony of that fatal morning, uniting me to one who had deluded me for his own profit, was no longer a fancy, it was a fact. I was wife to a man for whom I would, had he asked me openly, have freely

given all I possessed; for whom it had seemed to me a small thing to sacrifice half my future income, for whom I had in fact risked what was far more valuable than any amount of gold, the confidence, the esteem, and the good will of my nearest connections. But how had he repaid my trusting love? Oh how it made my blood boil to think of the long series of deceit and trick, which had been practised towards me!

And what was I to do now; how was I to behave to one who had so little deserved my regard? Acknowledge him as my husband; allow him and his now tenfold-odious sister, the object of all their plots and schemes? Oh rather than be the victim of their cold-hearted greedy confederacy, I would sacrifice all, every farthing I should ever possess. I shuddered at the thought of being claimed by one, of whose whole conduct I could only entertain the blackest suspicions. Had he but loved me, I whispered to myself, I could have borne anything for him; but, no—he had

never loved—it was all seeming—feigning—duping—from our first acquaintance! never, never would I see him again! Such was the first passionate determination of my wounded pride, and bitter angry grief.

St. John came back at last; unwillingly and slowly; looking sad, shocked, deeply grieved.

“You know all now,” said I in a whisper, as he sat down by me.

“No, indeed, I know only what you have done; but what induced you to act thus, so rashly, so imprudently, I cannot even guess?”

“Can you not? what makes women throw away their best prospects—their happiness—their respectability, do you not know?” asked I with a satirical smile.

“Is it possible that you can feel such an affection for *him*?” was his interrogative reply.

“You have not answered my question as I intended,” observed I, “I did not mean that

it was love on my side—but treachery and art on his !”

“My dear Henrietta !” exclaimed St. John with a start.

“Yes, I say it again,” I continued with a strange unaccountable composure, coming I believe from the very excess of my feelings, “it is the fact. I have been duped, deceived, drawn in by him, and by his sister ; and hardly had I set my feet in the snare that caught me when I discovered the whole system of fraud, by which I had been lured to this fatal act.”

St. John looked too much grieved and shocked to speak. There was a short silence.

At length he said, “I do not understand ; can you tell me how you have been duped, or no, perhaps it will agitate you too much ; do not distress yourself.”

“It will not hurt me. Listen, I married that man privately, because I believed that his political connections and family affairs, required that his change of faith should be a

secret for the present, and because he had by seeming to love me, won my love in return. St. John you cannot guess what that man is, or rather can be, when he chooses: no fallen angel could ever more artfully deceive his victims—and I—I have been his dupe—he married me for my money only, when I fancied he married me for love!”

“Are you sure you are just to him now?” said St. John as I paused, “in marrying you immediately he must have known that you forfeit so much, that surely you give him less credit than he deserves!”

“No, no, no; he knew what he was about, and so did his sister. Do you know to whom my forfeited income goes? it is to *him*! he is the very Mr. Grey, who in case of my marrying, profits by this bequest. Yes, he and his sister are the heirs to my great aunt.”

“Impossible—and yet—when, how did you learn this? Grey! yes that was the word in the register which I could not read. Oh, Henrietta who told you?”

I explained in as few words as I could my interview with Captain Ormond, and then, weary and worn out, I only desired secrecy from him for the present, and closing my eyes we were both silent for many minutes.

Still this confession had done me good: my secret weighed less oppressively now that I had shared it with him, and I felt that I could ask for protection and advice from one whom I looked on as a brother.

I was recovering rapidly, and the next day Marianne brought me a whole basket full of cards, notes, and letters, which she said I might examine, to see who cared for me. Conspicuously on the top of all were several cards from Sir Thomas, and my sister-in-law triumphantly assured me that he had never missed coming to inquire for me a single day.

I turned over the letters wistfully. Angry as I was, I yet in my heart longed to see the hand-writing of Theodore. There were moments when my love returned with overpowering force, and I felt persuaded that he

would be able to justify himself from all the treachery which my fears and my outraged pride imputed to him. But there was nothing, not one letter, not one line from him, and I cared not for the rest. His silence astonished and indeed distressed me. What could have become of him? Why did he not write? He did not know that I had discovered his deceit; he could have no knowledge of Captain Ormond's revelations, and he was quite aware that Sir Thomas Fenton was pledged to secrecy. This total silence, therefore, was most strange, most irritating. The suspicion that he meant to desert me entirely haunted my mind, and I was not enough equal to consecutive reflection to perceive that before he could obtain the money which I presumed had been his object, he must acknowledge and prove his marriage, in which case I should be sure to hear of him. St. John pointed this out to me, as affording at least some ground for hoping that he had been influenced by less hateful motives than I had feared

for he had evinced no hurry to profit by the riches which I had so incautiously, so unwisely given up to him: had his only object been to enrich himself at my expense, he would not perhaps have allowed three weeks to elapse before presenting his claims to the trustees.

A day or two more passed, and then Marianne asked me if I would see Sir Thomas Fenton; he had expressed a strong desire for an interview as soon as I was sufficiently well. Marianne looked arch and mysterious whenever she spoke of him, but that gave me no concern; I knew well enough that Sir Thomas at least would not fall into the error which deluded her. I declined a visit at first, but on her expressing how greatly he had been disappointed, I began to wonder why he wished to see me, and suddenly the idea presented itself that he had had some communication with Theodore, and might perhaps give me news of him.

The next time Marianne mentioned it, I

acceded, for I felt too conscious and ashamed to *ask* to see him, though the idea I now entertained had raised an extreme wish for an interview. I was in that nervous state that everything startled and frightened me, and I was agitated by the most unreasonable fears that my secret would be betrayed by every action I had to perform.

Sir Thomas came accordingly. I longed to see him alone, but Marianne was present, and I knew in that case I should obtain no information. However, full of her own ideas, and as desirous to leave us together as I was to be left, she slipped out of the room on some pretence, and the moment she was gone, Sir Thomas, coming close to me, said in a low voice:

"I am entrusted with these notes for you. Your illness has occasioned great anxiety and distress; I may venture to say now, I hope, that you are convalescent."

He placed in my hands a packet of letters! I knew the writing well. I dared not look

up: oh, the shameful misery of the clandestine bonds in which I was entangled!

“How came they in your keeping?” I stammered out.

He told me that he had received a note from Monsieur Mentesi, stating that his first letter had been enclosed to his sister, to be delivered to me by herself, but Caterina had been unable to see me, on account of my illness; so, fearful of exciting suspicions, he had sent them under cover to Sir Thomas, hoping that as he visited at the house he would be able to convey them safely, and trusting that till I was well enough to write myself he would have the charity to allay the fears of a distracted husband by a report of my state of health.

Oh, then Theodore had not deserted me! and yet, unreasonable as I was in everything, I was now as much disturbed at the channel he had chosen for communication as I had been before at the prolonged silence on his part.

Having performed his commission, my visitor soon took his leave, I suppose to allow me to read my husband's letters.

Yes, it was true! they were my *husband's* letters, and my heart rejoiced at the sight of them. I tried to persuade myself that it was only because I wished for an opportunity of reproaching him, of expressing my sense of the deception, the ill-usage I had met with; but I believe my secret feeling was a hope that he could in some way prove his innocence, and reinstate himself in my affection. I knew he could not, and yet I flattered myself he would.

It was a good while before I unfolded one of the envelopes. I sat looking at the address, fearing and hoping too much to have courage to break the seal. But at length, with a desperate resolve, I tore one open, and hastily ran through the contents.

Professions of attachment, regrets at absence, anxiety for me, and gratitude for my confidence, these filled the first; and the

subsequent ones resembled it, except in expressions of stronger alarm, and more devoted tenderness. Could I but have closed the eyes of my mind again, could I once more have sunk back in the delicious ignorance of how I had been misled, those notes would have been all I could have desired. But the truth—the terrible truth had been forced upon me, and I sickened at heart as I read sentences on which I could place no trust, and professions every word of which I believed was insincere. I put them all away, and sternly resolved to send no answer of any kind. I could only have penned reproaches, and to me such a course appeared undignified. Silence should be my method of expressing my feelings; a silence which could not fail, I was assured, to excite some alarm in the guilty conscience of him who had so entirely deceived me.

Until his return, I resolved to have no communication whatever with him, and the duration of his stay at Paris, was as yet en-

tirely uncertain. As to his own letters, which were still transmitted through his former rival, I begged Sir Thomas to send them regularly to the care of St. John, and by that means avoided any farther direct communication with him.

Captain Ormond, with more delicacy than I should have expected, had refrained from communicating to any of my family the nature of our interview. My emotion had assured him that I was deeply interested in Theodore, and he did not wish to publish speculations as to my feelings, which had been so indirectly confirmed by his own observations. Little as he guessed the real nature of my secret, he had discerned there was one, and left me to announce it at my own leisure. As to St. John, I knew what he thought and felt. Every principle of sincerity, candour, decorum, and prudence, which he considered necessary to the feminine character had been violated by my proceedings, and he was too much shocked to express his opinions. I read

them in his silence, in the gravity of his looks when he was reminded in any way of my affairs; especially when Marianne alluded, as she so often did, to Sir Thomas Fenton. I read it in the tone of pity with which he addressed me, when we were together, for St. John was not the man to despise and ridicule error, but to pity and, if he could, assist the erring. We did not talk of it however; I could not begin, and he would not; but his tender care of me, his exquisite kindness from that time, whilst they showed the goodness of his heart made me so excessively ashamed of myself, that I could hardly endure his society. It always overwhelmed me with self-reproach.

The rest of the family were most conveniently unconscious of every thing peculiar in our respective proceedings. Grace especially, little suspected in what a dilemma I was entangled, and although she was silent on the subject, I could perceive that she had really taken up the opinions of Marianne, and imagined Sir Thomas was attached to me.

My sister-in-law herself was engaged at that time in endeavouring to effect another matrimonial alliance between Edward and Miss Elson, to which proceedings the lady herself seemed much inclined. She was always scheming to throw them together, arranging excursions in which Edward was Miss Elson's escort, and parties where they would sit together. I could see this plainly enough, but I did not expect it would succeed. Edward bore with it, apparently because he was totally unconscious of her plans. I believed he looked on Miss Elson, as so much his senior, that he considered himself quite safe in her company, and would have answered any allusion to matrimonial schemes, had they been suggested, by saying, "a man must not marry his grandmother."

I did not at all like the idea; that is I should not have liked it had I thought it a possible thing; but viewing it as I did, I only thought it an absurd one. Edward's affections had been once given, and given so fully and

entirely, that he seemed now to have no heart to bestow in any woman. Grave, silent, devoted to his profession, he might perhaps bid fair to be a good lawyer, he did not promise to be a happy man. My father's friends who knew about such things, predicted that he would rise at the bar, because he never suffered his mind to be turned off to any other topic. Fond as he had been of hunting, shooting, cricket, and other sports, he abandoned them all, or nearly so, and his only recreations were such as could be obtained in solitary excursions abroad, or quiet study at home.

I am anticipating a little in saying this, for of course at the time we were in London, his habits had not become so fixed as they were after a series of years; they were only undergoing a process of development. But even then his whole life, it was evident, had received a check; he was like some tree, whose leading branch had been cut off, and which can never afterwards regain the upward and vigorous growth it had once promised; it might throw

out other boughs, and continue to spread in various directions, but the efforts would be unnatural and distorted, and always bearing evidence of the early violence it had received.

Such was Edward's character now, and in after life; and this I always knew was my doing. Stuart, frivolous and worldly-minded; Edward, bitter and morose, such was the result of the influence which I had exerted on both my brothers. It has been a weary thought to me for many a long year, and when I think of my own fate, I feel deeply indeed, how self-will and self-indulgence are not only dangerous to an individual, but hurtful to all within the influence of their taint.

CHAPTER IV.

"Darker and darker ! hardly a glimmer
Of light comes in at the window-pane
Or is it my eyes are growing dimmer ?
I cannot disentangle this skein."

GOLDEN LEGEND.

It was six weeks since my marriage, and the time had brought us to the beginning of July ; I was well enough to move, and they were anxious to get me into the country. My father, too, wanted to be at home. Lady Suffield was returned to Cheslyn Grange, and was to give up possession of it in August ; there were some preparations to be made, and some business to be transacted. Then was to follow Grace's wedding, and after that we had

vague plans of having a good many of Marianne's relations to visit us. She wanted me married very much, I could see, because she would then have tried to arrange that she and Stuart should reside with my father, and keep house for him. The situation would have suited her exactly, and it promised well for my father's comfort also, for Marianne had steady notions of propriety towards him, and so great a regard for appearances as would always ensure him the respect and observance he deserved. In all the conventional forms of attention and civility she was very perfect. At present, however, having no immediate prospect of my abdicating in her favour from the headship of the household, she was content to propose a visit to us, to be extended to an indefinite time from my sister's marriage, and I was glad to accept it.

Home we went to Fairy Hill for a month. I did not care what I did, or where I went. Life seemed a blank to me at that time. Nothing could restore me the unlimited con-

fidence I had once placed in Theodore; nothing could release me from the bond which fixed my fate. With him, or without him, all was equally miserable in prospect or in possession. I was wretched, and saw no end to my wretchedness.

But he was thinking of returning to England; my silence, for I had never vouchsafed him a word, alarmed and irritated him. His letters were sometimes tenderly entreating—sometimes indignantly remonstrative. I liked those best. I did not believe he loved, but I could easily credit that he was angry with me.

I knew we must soon meet now, and I dreaded the meeting enough to wish to defer it; and seemed to my uneasy mind as if removing from London would remove me to a greater distance from him. Meeting alone would not have been so awful to me, however; I was capable of taking my own part, if that had been all, and could, under the circumstances, have defended myself from the

whole family. The injury I had suffered gave me strength of mind, and I did not look on my marriage as a moral tie, much less as a religious one. I was resolved to defy and set at nought all the duties of a wife, excepting what I could not help; and at that time, I looked on the bond I had submitted to, rather as separating me from others, than as uniting me to Theodore. But a quarrel with him, which I foresaw as inevitable, and a stern resolution to separate from him, to which I intended to adhere, were not all. There would come a moment when explanation with my family would become inevitable, and the bare idea distracted me. Of course he would claim me as his wife, and my fortune as his property; the truth must then immediately become apparent, and what would my father and brothers say?

The very delay since my marriage, and the strange circumstances which had betrayed my secret to Sir Thomas Fenton, would add to their grief and anger. And what should I

have to support me in the trouble thus coming on me? No love and confidence in him whom I had chosen for my husband. Nothing, nothing to show, of all the things which tempt women to brave the anger of those dear to them. I had sold myself for what? Mine had indeed been a losing game, and the shame attendant on being duped and overreached, was the crowning bitterness of my lot.

Well, well. We were at home again now, and I felt I could better bear these things at home than in London. I was myself here, assuming my own dimensions, not crushed into nothingness and insignificance in the crowd.

Outwardly things went on smoothly. Every body was very kind, and my pale altered looks excited sympathy in those who knew me. How good Lady Suffield was to me! She was, of course, everything which a mother could wish to be to the object of her son's choice; but she had still an especial tender-

ness for me; as if she would compensate for St. John's preference of another, by peculiar affection herself. It was more than once on my lips to tell her my secret. I did not at the time know what stopped me; I do now. An intuitive perception of the view she would take of my duty as a wife; that very duty to which I was resolved to shut my eyes.

But the day came which brought a letter from Theodore, not by post, however; it was brought over by Sir Thomas Fenton's groom from Highanger Lodge, together with some books which the baronet had once promised to lend to Grace. It was to this effect:—

“ Highanger Lodge.

“ HENRIETTA,

“ I have just arrived here with Sir Thomas. I am only six miles from my wife ! I must see you to-morrow. Name time and place yourself; but unless you do, I shall choose my own. You have not used me kindly. Why do you not write? But silence

can no longer avail. We shall meet to-morrow at all events, and you shall no longer throw off your husband.

“ T. M.”

He gave me no explanation then how he came there, and no power of refusing to see him. I answered the note briefly :—

“ Call to-morrow at Fairy Hill at twelve o'clock.

“ H. M.”

Grace was to spend the day at Cheslyn Grange, and I was therefore sure of her absence. But I was resolved not to meet him alone. I determined to appeal to St. John.

With the steadiest voice that I could command, I said :

“ Monsieur Mentesi is coming here to-morrow, at twelve o'clock. Could you be with me then to meet him ?”

“Henrietta ! your husband !” His answer was in a tone of reproach ; I knew what he meant.

“Do not call him that,” I exclaimed impatiently, “it is a title I will never give him.”

“How can you talk so, Henrietta ? you have no power to deny the title.”

“Don’t drive me desperate if you can help it, St. John. Do not let us dispute ; only promise to be with me to-morrow.”

“Why ! what for ?”

“Promise,” I repeated impetuously.

“Certainly, I will if I can. But, Henrietta, will he like it ?”

“Probably not ; but that is not my consideration. St. John, I cannot, and I will not meet him alone. I cannot depend upon myself. When I think of all that he has done to me, I am so angry, that I dare not trust myself to remonstrances. I want you to speak for me, and tell him calmly and steadily that his fraud has been detected, that I am no

longer deceived ; that he shall have the money for which he tricked me ; and which I gave up when I married him ; but that this is all that he shall ever have ; and that he shall never, never see me again. No ! let him take the fortune which tempted him to this villainous conduct, but never let him cross my path again. You will tell him this, St. John ? ”

“ No, I will not, Henrietta. You are his wife, and I will have no share in tempting you to break the vows which you pledged of your own free will.”

“ I did not make the vows to Theodore Grey, but to Theodore Mentesi ; and they are not—they cannot be binding, when made under a delusion.”

“ You made them to God, Henrietta, ‘ for better for worse.’ You promised solemnly to take, as your husband, that very man, whether he was named Grey or Mentesi.”

“ Oh, St. John ! can you wish to make me miserable ? ” I burst into tears.

"No, dear Henrietta ; next to Grace and my mother's, I think your happiness is dear to me. But I know that a painful or unpleasing duty, performed truly, leads far more surely to peace, and so to happiness, than any self-chosen, wilful ways of avoiding it."

I was silent.

"Dear Henrietta, you are the wife of this man, be he what he may ; I have no doubt he must love you."

I shook my head impatiently.

"He must, unless you turn his love into bitterness by anger and scorn. Whatever his conduct may have been, henceforth your well-being and respectability are inseparably connected with his. It is your first duty to consider this."

"I will never forgive him," I answered passionately.

"Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive," said he, in a low voice, and then paused.

"I cannot—it is no use." I repeated the words. He looked extremely pained and

shocked, but was silent. I covered my face with my hands to avoid his reproachful glance. At last I said,

“Oh, St. John, I am very miserable, and you don't pity me.”

“Do I not?” said he drawing a chair beside mine; “if you think so, it must be because my manners are not true to my feelings. But now, Henrietta, you know that to help us to bear things which will probably be painful, the best way always is to look at the truth. Think of what you must do,—of what you ought to do, and of what you ought not to do, and leave what you may feel, entirely out of the question. At least, think as little as possible about it. You have, I know, a hard and painful duty before you, so you need all the encouragement which can be derived from looking at the best side of everything. In the first place to begin with the least important consideration. He is your husband, and his honor and respectability are now yours. Would you then at the same moment that you

must proclaim your marriage, make known also your causes of complaint? Would you wish to point out the man whose name you must bear, as the perpetrator of a fraud too gross to be forgiven? Consider how unnecessary it is to let this be known, and how much to your own future worldly advantage it will be to hide what, except through your own act, need not be known. Then your happiness—think of that! Would not his love, esteem, and confidence for the future be better than anger and hatred and separation? It would be bad to be the subject of scorn and ill-natured pity to the neighbourhood as his dupe; but it would be worse to be for ever at war with your husband; bound to a man whose injuries you had returned in kind, and from whom you could not hope for forgiveness you would not grant. You will make him desperate if you blast his character, and cut yourself off by so doing from every possible hope of happiness yourself. Oh, Henrietta! forgive him, and only try whether

gentleness, forbearance, kindness, on your part, will not win him really to love you with the affection which you say he simulated. Make him yours by the ties of gratitude, and you will not—cannot fail to find the blessing of forgiveness. And then think of the higher duty. The duty that your vows imposed on you—to love, honor, obey—dare you break that solemn promise the moment you are called on to fulfil it? You have really no choice, and even if worldly advantage and honor, temporal happiness and domestic peace were not also at stake, you would still have no right to decide otherwise than to do your duty as a wife. I am afraid my words are very cold, and sound hard; but it is so difficult to put one's feelings into expressions which do not seem either exaggerated or indifferent. It is your happiness for which I am pleading; your happiness here, and, oh! much more—your happiness hereafter—your eternal welfare!”

He might have talked much longer, without

interruption. I was crying too bitterly to speak—crying from self-pity, as various images of what I was, what I might have been, and what I must be now, passed through my mind. But my tears were softer, and my feelings less irritated than they had been before. At last I sobbed out,

“St. John, I will try. Come to-morrow; help me; explain for me, and—and—if he is penitent I will try to forgive him. Only be with me, lest my pride should rise up again, and our first meeting be our last, through my anger.”

He promised this, and I was satisfied.

It was not likely that, with such an expectation, I should have much thought for anything or person beside; I who had never studied to control my mind, or gain any command over my impulsive nature. I believe I was wrapped up during the whole evening in visions and ideal scenes. In imagination I acted again and again my first meeting with my husband, pictured his looks, his words, his

tones; my own lofty reception, my calm but impressive words, the language of dignity, wounded affection, and generous, high-souled emotion. I fancied him penitent, humble, kneeling at my feet, imploring the forgiveness on which his happiness depended; or proudly, nobly indignant at an accusation from which he was able entirely to justify himself. Sometimes the scene ended in an entire reconciliation; sometimes, most often indeed, in a protracted struggle on my part, a struggle which would take time, and assiduity, and patience, to bring to a happy conclusion. I suppose, however, I had a full conviction that I should yield at last; for I never really imagined an entire and total separation. I *said* I did; but in my heart I dwelt so much on the pains he would take to win me once more, that on consideration now, I feel sure that even then my love was still strong within me.

One thing which occupied my mind a good deal, was how Theodore came to be at High-anger. I did not know till afterwards that

this was entirely owing to the goodness of Sir Thomas, whose friendly feelings for me (most undeserved on my part) made him desirous to do the utmost to help me in the extremely difficult situation in which I had placed myself.

On his return from Paris, Theodore had gone to him for intelligence, perhaps for advice, and Sir Thomas, taking advantage of the influence which a strong, upright, and straightforward will has over a weak and passionate spirit, seized on the opportunity to compel Monsieur Mentesi to act in such a way as would be most certain to ensure my comfort. The marriage of course must now be owned. Sir Thomas was too sincerely my friend to aid in concealing it unnecessarily; but in order to give it every external appearance of respectability, he lent his support and countenance to my husband, took him to his house, called him his friend, and spoke openly of having known his father's family.

Theodore no longer appeared as the mere Italian adventurer, and my pride would be soothed by the idea of this circumstance. I have reason to know, also, that Sir Thomas made no scruple of very plainly representing to him how wrongly and unfairly he had used me, and urged on him the propriety of making every possible compensation for the deceit which had been practised towards me. I do not suppose Theodore liked the remonstrances so unhesitatingly made; but he was too much obliged for the favours conferred to refuse to listen and agree.

That weary night, I believe I heard each hour strike, and my ghastly looks in the morning actually attracted my father's attention. I laid the blame on a head-ache, caused by the heat, and expressed a wish for quietness after breakfast. Grace went up to the Grange, my father went out on business, and Mrs. Brook was in her own room. A few minutes before twelve, St. John came in. I was lying on the sofa, cold and passive; I felt as if I

was incapable of another emotion, as if life—past, present, and future—were totally indifferent to me. But the sight of him reminded me of what was to follow, and my sickness of heart showed me that I was not quite incapable of feeling.

It was but a short time that I had, however, for recollection. Not five minutes after his entrance, the door bell was heard long and loud. I started up, in the middle of a sentence of concern and anxiety, which St. John was whispering; all the blood in my body seemed to rush to my cheeks, from my heart, and then to flow back again until I was nearly choked. The door was thrown open, and Sir Thomas Fenton and Monsieur Mentesi were announced.

I gave a sob of relief, dropped St. John's arm, which in my terror I had grasped, and advanced a step towards the baronet. In a moment I saw it all. Theodore was afraid to come alone; he was looking alarmed and cowed; I despised, but I no longer feared

him. I held out my hand to Sir Thomas, and tried to put my consciousness of obligation, and my real gratitude into the pressure which I gave him. He looked at me gravely and anxiously, then turned to my husband, and drew me towards him. I bent my head haughtily, but Sir Thomas did not let go my hand, until he had placed it in Theodore's, whilst he looked from one to the other with an expression not to be misunderstood. I was tamed, subdued, silenced by the gravity of his eyes; and when Theodore, stooping, warmly kissed my hand, my self-possession so entirely deserted me, that I had a severe struggle with my tears.

Pride came to my support, as I saw the glance with which my husband scanned my face; I dashed away my softer feelings, recalled the injuries which I had suffered, snatched away my hand, and coldly drawing myself up, turned to Sir Thomas, and asked in a steady voice how long he had been in the country, at the same moment I gave an

imploing look at St. John to assist with some conversation. I daresay he felt, as well as I did, that under our peculiar circumstances a scene would be awkward, and an explanation impossible before witnesses; so he came forward, was formally introduced to Theodore, and tried to find some conversation. Of course, as we were all thinking of something else, our efforts had little success; our few ideas were unconnected, and our sentences incoherent; and somebody (I think it was Sir Thomas) had just propounded that it was warm, when the door opened, and my father entered.

I really believe it was a relief to us all, though I must say Theodore's face expressed a complication of feelings not easy to be described. Sir Thomas again introduced his friend, and such an introduction carried all the weight that could be expected. My father began conversing with the baronet; the rest of us were silent, until St. John, who was anxious to go home, and supposed he was no

longer necessary, went away, and I could not prevent it.

Presently afterwards my father, who was apparently blind to the pre-occupation and silence of his companions, asked Sir Thomas to walk out to the stable and give an opinion about a new purchase, and before I had presence of mind enough to interfere, they were gone. He did, indeed, civilly invite Monsieur Mentesi to accompany them, if he was interested in horses ; but Theodore declined, and in another minute I was left alone with my husband.

I laid down the work which had apparently been engrossing my attention as well as my hands, and looked towards the door with a half resolution to run away ; but Theodore, alone, had instantly recovered his self-possession, and stopped me unceremoniously. Coldly and haughtily I drew back from the arm which he tried to pass round my waist, and though remembering that flight would be un-

dignified, and delay useless, since sooner or later an explanation must come, I resolved to stand my ground, yet I also resolved at the same moment to yield nothing except to penitence and submission.

Theodore's passions were strong and fiery, but I had a perception that his will was less resolute than mine, and I hardened myself for a struggle, although I had hardly any definite idea of what my wishes or his for the future would be.

Drawing back, as I said, I spoke in a calm, low voice:—

“Why do we meet now? What do you seek?”

He uttered an expressive ejaculation in his own language, and then went on in English:—

“Is it possible you ask this, Henrietta? is this the way a wife meets her husband?”

“That must depend upon the way in which they parted, I imagine,” was my cold reply,

“and also on events that may have occurred in the interval.”

His face flushed and varied ; he came close to me, took my hands in both of his, and looking down upon me, with those eyes whose influence I could not help owning, he said:—

“Henrietta, what has happened to make you speak thus?”

I turned away coldly, yet my heart throbbed with violence, and old feelings were coming back against my will. I could almost have forgiven him without another word ; but that he was my husband, and the remembrance that forgiveness, submission, obedience, from me, were no longer favours granted, but simply duties fulfilled on my part, stung my pride into obstinacy. He should find he had won no tame, impassive wife, who, spaniel like, could fawn upon the hand that struck her, but a woman, strong, resolute, able to take her own part, and support the rights of her sex against the artifice, the treachery, or the tyranny of his.

“Monsieur Mentesi will hardly need farther explanation, I apprehend, when I say that I have been informed of his father’s name and family claims on me.”

I folded my arms, drew up my figure, and with raised head and steady eye watched the effect of my words. Theodore staggered back as if he had been struck, sat down on a sofa, and covered his face with both his hands.

“Yes,” I went on, the remembrance of my wrongs exciting me to greater indignation; “yes, Theodore, I know it all. I know the base treachery, the long-continued series of deceits, the deep-laid schemes by which I was lured on, and how whilst I dreamt of love, and confidence, and good faith, I was really made a victim to your mercenary views. Whilst I freely sacrificed for you half my future fortune, whilst I risked the anger of my family, and the censure of the world—whilst I gave you the true, unlimited, undoubting affection of my whole heart, and despised for your sake all the temptations of wealth and rank—you

did what? answer me! what did you give me in return for all this? tell me—speak to me if you dare!”

“My love—my deepest affection,” exclaimed he, starting up as I stood before him, and passionately throwing his arms round me, he covered my face with kisses. “Henrietta, you are my wife, you must not you shall not, speak to me thus.”

I was taken by surprise, but I was angry not softened. I struggled to disengage myself, and exclaimed indignantly :

“Your wife I am not, and will not be that. You who married me under a false name, dare you claim me now? Do you not know that such a marriage may be pronounced illegal, and that I may defy your claims altogether?” I was speaking merely at random, but my words had a visible effect; he did not know enough of law to feel sure whether what I said was true or not, and he drew back with every appearance of perplexity and dismay. He walked up and down the room; I stood

still, rather enjoying his distress. At last he came up to me, but more humbly.

“Is it possible that my wife, my own darling wife, can doubt my love?”

“The love of a man who tricks a woman out of fifteen hundred a year, Monsieur Mentesi, may well be doubted,” said I, interrupting him impatiently.

“You use hard words—words which may well try my love,” said he, with more command of temper than I expected; “but I know that my conduct must have seemed strange if you only learnt the fact you name, without the explanation. Who told you? Not Sir Thomas Fenton?”

“What does that signify,” said I impatiently; it made me angry to find that he wanted to justify himself. I had no idea that he would have any excuse to offer.

“Answer me one question at least,” said he with more impetuosity. “Had I told you my father’s name when first I asked you to be my wife, what should you have thought or said?”

"That you were honest at least," I replied with a derisive smile.

He bit his lip.

"But would you have married me then?" he said, after a pause.

"Perhaps I might."

"Would to Heaven I could have given you the opportunity of trying ! But, Henrietta, did I not always tell you I was pledged, bound, fettered, by engagements which prevented my seeking you openly. Did I altogether deceive you?"

"You did ; and now your deceit is discovered you may try in vain to blind my eyes any more."

He interrupted and silenced me as he had done before. He told me he would not let me speak thus ; he reminded me, but in the tenderest terms, of the vow I had taken to him ; he made the most passionate protestations of affection, and he entreated, implored me to forgive what had seemed strange or wrong, on trust ; promised me an explanation .

and conjured me, by every word of endearment our language furnished, to consent and own our marriage, and confide my happiness to his care.

I do not know how it was, but angry as I had been, injured as I felt I was, Theodore's tones, and looks, and caresses had as much power over me as ever. I could not retain the coldness of pride and reserve; I leant my head upon his breast and sobbed, but they were tears of love and of forgiveness. I was mistaken in supposing my will was stronger than his, for though it might be more fixed and resolute, it was certainly less vehement and overbearing, and the impetuosity of his demonstrations bore down my determination at the time, as they say the violence of the wind and waves is quelled for a time by the fury of a cannonade, even though they may afterwards break out with redoubled power.

But many more words had not passed between us, when I heard the gentlemen's footsteps in the vestibule, and voices approach-

ing. I sprang from my husband's arms, and running to the window, stepped out upon the lawn, where I began to busy myself with some flowers. He slowly followed me, and was standing on the step when the others entered the room.

Sir Thomas came out to me there.

"Your father has asked me to stay and lunch, Miss Moore, and has sent my carriage round to the stable. Will you confirm the invitation?" He said this aloud, then added in an under tone, meant only for me, "If it is disagreeable I will recollect an engagement directly, so do not hesitate."

There was a glance at Theodore, who came up to my side before I answered, and whispered:

"May we not stay?"

My answer was affirmative, and then I regretted that I had not said "no."

After a little silence, Sir Thomas went on:

"How does the rock work in the shrubbery do; I wish you would take me to see it."

I agreed. I wanted to talk to him. Theodore looked anxious. I whispered that he must remain with my father, and reluctantly he returned to the drawing-room.

As soon as we were at a safe distance Sir Thomas began.

"I really do not know whether I am transgressing the duty of a friend, but my conscience reproaches me so every time I call you Miss Moore—" he hesitated.

"I see what you mean," I said, with an effort at composure, "the moment the necessity ceases, the disguise shall cease too—but we had not time to discuss that."

"He has asked me to mention the matter in case he should not have an opportunity. I believe all necessity for concealment has ceased now, so far as he is concerned."

"Then he might favour me with an explanation of his conduct," I replied, with rising indignation; "are you also the medium for carrying that, Sir Thomas?"

"I must leave the task of explanation to

himself," replied he, gravely, "I fear I should not improve matters by interfering between you, in that way."

"How came you to know, and be concerned in his affairs?" said I, after a little silent consideration.

"Our fathers were intimate; and I saw a good deal of Theodore Grey, during my boyhood. I was much in Italy with my parents, and after Mr. Grey's death, we often played together. For the sake of old times I have always been interested in him, in spite of —" he stopped abruptly, and seemed to recollect himself.

"In spite of what?" said I, eagerly.

"Of political engagements, and connexions, for purposes which he believed patriotic. I had disapproved of much that he has done."

"Did you know he was in England, when you came back?" I asked, as my mind reverted to past scenes.

"Not till I saw him in that cottage with you. I had some explanation with him after

that, but owing to his political engagements he was desirous that his secret should be kept, so I was silenced !”

“ And can you really assure me, Sir Thomas, that when I know all his motives and reasons for his concealments, I shall be satisfied both as to the past and to the future ?”

“ Excuse me, I cannot answer such questions. Husbands and wives must settle past, present, and future difficulties for themselves. What I have to say now is, that if I can be of the smallest service to you in arranging matters, you may command me.”

“ Take him away then after luncheon,” was my answer. “ The strain on my nerves is too great to bear his presence before my father. Tell him, when he can send me such an explanation of the past, as I can venture to repeat, I will allow him to claim me as his wife.”

“ You must allow him to do that,” said Sir Thomas, “ for you will not be able to prevent it. What ever Theodore might wish, there

are others whose claims are involved, and whose tongues are not to be silenced. I believe he would do anything in the way of forbearance, were he left to himself; the unfortunate part is, that he is fettered by others. My advice is, therefore, that you arrange your plans as speedily as possible, for otherwise an *éclaircissement* will be forced on you both, whether you wish it or not. I can quite see the probable unpleasantness in which an explanation will involve you with your family; but come it must, and it would surely be more graceful if it came voluntarily from yourself."

"True—thank you for your kind concern. If you were to tell my father what you know of Theodore—but no: I will not be a coward—I am in a dilemma—in a labyrinth, but I will walk straight forward now, even though the hedges scratch me. As soon as I know what to tell, I will speak. But, Sir Thomas, I trusted Theodore so entirely, that all explanation must come from him."

“Theodore will be true to you, if he is let alone; all I fear for you is the influence which has warped his whole life. The fanaticism of his mother made him a priest and a patriot; the interested selfishness of his sister has made him what he is now, in respect to you. You may be his good angel and save him from sinking lower; if not, I fear the influence to which he will yield will tend little to your future happiness.”

My eyes were opening a little to my real position, and after again entreating Sir Thomas to persuade my husband to a complete explanation, we returned slowly and thoughtfully to the house together.

CHAPTER V.

"This said I, for I could not choose.
After a pause, my father spake
In that cold and deliberate tone
Which turns the hearers into stone.
And seems itself the act to be
That follows with such dread certainty."

GOLDEN LEGEND.

It was not till our visitors were gone, and I was left to my own reflections, that I felt how little the interview had answered my expectations. I had implied forgiveness and reconciliation, although I had failed in obtaining anything like an explanation or apology for the injury inflicted. But this had always been the case in my intercourse with Theodore. He overpowered me by vehemence, he baffled

me by evasion, he blinded me by tender flattery ; for the time I was satisfied, and rested on his words, then when I tried in a moment of calm contemplation to recall what had thus fascinated me, there was nothing ; nothing but words, which after all might mean merely to deceive.

There was one support to which I clung amidst the uneasy reflections excited by this visit, the kindness of Sir Thomas ; he was so thoroughly my friend, and seemed to possess such great influence over Theodore that I trusted by his help to tide over these difficulties (to use a favourite expression of the present time) and extricate myself with less trouble from the explanation awaiting me, than I could otherwise have hoped for. I tried to quiet myself by these notions ; and succeeded in maintaining an external calm until the evening, when we were to go to the Grange and join the family at dinner.

Grace was anxious to know that my head was better, and although I assured her that it

was, she did not seem quite satisfied. She came to me after dinner as I was standing at the door leading to the conservatory, and clasping one arm round my waist, she drew her soft fingers gently down my forehead and cheek.

"Dear Henrietta," she whispered, as we sauntered into the conservatory together. "I wish I knew what makes you so unhappy!"

"What makes you so fanciful, Grace," said I, trying to laugh, "you anxious little thing!"

"Henrietta, you are uneasy; you have been crying to-day; your eyes are hot, and your heart throbs, and there is a sob in your voice which tells me you are uneasy and distressed. Can I not help you, my own dear sister?"

"No, Grace, no—I need no help."

"St. John is uneasy about you too," she went on.

"Did he tell you so?" I asked quickly, "he ought not to say so."

"He did not need to say so. I can tell it by his silence."

"It is all your imagination, Grace; if I had anything to trouble me which I could tell you—"

I stopped short, conscious that she must soon learn the truth.

Clara Suffield came up just then and asked us to have some coffee. Grace went back with her. I sat down in a quiet dusky corner of the conservatory and fell into a reverie. There I was found by Lady Suffield who seated herself beside me, and began to speak about Grace. Gradually our conversation glided from Grace to myself, and something I said induced her to observe:—

"My dear child, I don't mean to be impatient, but I was told positively you were engaged to Sir Thomas Fenton."

"It is quite false," said I. "You may contradict it. I am not, I never shall be. Pray say so."

"Henrietta, such protestations are not in my line, and you must know, are generally contradicted by facts. If I said you were not, I

should leave out the never would be. It looks as if you thought about it to say so."

"You would not say so if you knew all," was my heedless answer. I forgot what it implied.

"When you tell me all," said she, kissing me, "I shall know, but am afraid, my love, there is something not quite to your wishes in your present prospects."

I covered my face with my hands, and leant on her shoulder. Sobs and tears would come.

"My dear child! my poor Henrietta!" and then she kissed me so tenderly.

"You would not speak to me so, if you knew all," I exclaimed vehemently. She smoothed down my hair.

"You would not mistrust me, if you knew how I love you," was her kind answer. "If you do not like to tell me the cause of your grief, at least believe that you have my warmest sympathy. I know there are some troubles which had better not be talked about."

"You will know mine soon enough," I

exclaimed, "oh, dear Lady Suffield, if I were not afraid; it would be a comfort to me to tell you all."

"Afraid!"

"Yes: you will be so shocked, but then you must know it. Would you hate me less for doing what is wrong if I owned it at once."

"I should not hate you at all."

"Well, despise me, I mean—turn away from me—give me up."

"My dear child, you could never have done anything deserving such unkindness; and a fault owned, is half-atoned for already."

"But suppose I were to tell you that—that—for instance, that I am married, Lady Suffield, would you not be shocked?"

She started and looked at me earnestly.

"I should imagine you were in jest."

"But if I told you it was no jest—what then?"

"I should think you had been so imprudent

and thoughtless, that you would need all the more forbearance and love from your friends to smooth your path and make you happy?"

"Ah! but if I added that I had made choice of one whom my family would dislike, who was a foreigner; and that for his sake I had deceived all my friends, and wilfully, obstinately, gone my own way, then what would you say?"

I felt Lady Suffield's hand tremble as it lay upon my shoulder. I did not look at her, as I spoke these words, fast and low.

"Then, dear child, if you told me you had done this, my first advice would be to own it all, to throw aside concealment, and honestly say the truth. And if in such circumstances you needed a friend like myself to speak or act, to conciliate or counsel, to support or explain, I should still say, come to me and trust to me."

"Would you really be so good?"

"If you *had* done it! but my words would be different were you only about to do it."

"It is done, Lady Suffield. I am the wife of Theodore Mentesi!"

"My love! he is a popish priest."

"Not now, he is a Protestant; he has forsaken his church."

"Ah!"

There came a long silence. I was quiet and calm, quiet even to indifference. She was thinking. So we sat till we were interrupted by my father preparing to go home, and we had to move; but I whispered to her to ask St. John, he knew all, and might tell her all he knew. I had a letter sent over to me the next morning from Theodore. It was what I had been expecting and wishing for, yet it made me tremble, it seemed as if the next step must be to make it all known, and I dreaded that moment of explanation more than I can tell. I took the letter, and going out, resolved to read it on the very spot where we had so often met; where we had quarrelled, been reconciled, and exchanged the first promises of affection and faith.

Seated in that recess by the river, with a beating heart, I broke the seal and read:—

“Were I addressing any one of whose generosity, tenderness, and candour, I felt less sure than I do of those of my darling wife, I should certainly enter on this recapitulation of my past conduct, with more fear, though perhaps with less regret. I should tremble had I to appeal to a severe and impartial judge, a being incapable of comprehending the influence of love, or the temptations of despair. But, Henrietta, if I have sinned against you, I have been sorely punished, and will you not forgive? Consider the reason—or rather the temptation—no, but you cannot, because it is yourself: your own, dear exquisite self, which formed my temptation; and of the power of that you can never have the least idea. But will you not pardon a crime, of which you were the motive—love for you—you, without whom the world is all darkness and despair, and with whom—with your love, Henrietta, I can fancy no Paradise more

delightful. When my mother and sister came to England, it was entirely with a view of ascertaining what prospect there was of inheriting the fortune which conditionally on your marriage, would be ours. At Milan we had heard much of you from the Padre who taught you our language. He fancied from your character, which had interested him, that you were likely to spurn the constraint of waiting—and from correspondents in England, imagined it probable your future brother-in-law would be your suitor. That we should be deeply interested in the event you may forgive. We were poor, and for my country's cause, if not for my own, I wanted money. We felt it unjust that we should be dependent for an income, which in fairness we ought to have shared, on any caprice of yours. If we had any right to it all, it should have been ours, whether you married or not; and Caterina, who guided my mother, resolved to settle in England, at least until this chance was lost, and if she could win your confidence, to

point out to you the justice of giving us what was certainly, both by the will of our great aunt, and in equity, our due.

“ But in order to succeed the better, it was judged advisable that you and all the world should be ignorant of our interest in the matter. We should have had too many prejudices to encounter otherwise. We were pretty well aware there was not much risk of meeting unwelcome acquaintance. My mother and sister preceded you home, made your acquaintance. Caterina gained your confidence, and, as you know, ascertained our mistake as to Mr. Suffield. But another plan had occurred to Caterina. Political connections brought me to England, and she suggested, Henrietta, that, since your heart was vacant, I should try to win it. *Anima mia!* I did not at first agree; there were obstacles; religion, profession, country; and I had not seen you. But when we met! ah, I forgot every obstacle, and madly pledged myself, for the chance of winning you, to the ar-

rangement which has so nearly lost your love—nearly, but oh! not quite. Did I think I had really forfeited your affection—had I no hope of the heart-forgiveness for which I plead, I could not live. I do not mean to justify myself—I had no right to make the bargain that I did; but, oh, sweetest wife, I did not stop to reflect. Friends in Italy, patriots to whose cause I was pledged, assisted us to remain in England. Without their aid and support we could not have undergone the expense, and I, in return, promised them repayment whenever — Henrietta, how can I write the base bargain? my soul blushes to think that I could, even in the delirium of the passion with which you had inspired me, speculate on the possession of your fortune. Hate me for it! ah no, pity and pardon me! In the ardour of pursuit, whilst your love was doubtful, I shut my eyes to the light of truth, and my ears to the voice of conscience. But when I succeeded, when you owned your affection, and gave me your confidence, I

appeal to yourself, beloved, did I not repent? did I not warn you? did I not implore you to hate, to dismiss, to banish me from your heart? do you not remember my misery, my doubts, my entreaties? Bound as I was to silence, fettered by promises of secrecy, engaged as a man of honour to do my utmost to win your hand, urged by inexpressible love, tortured by self-reproach at the seeming treachery of my conduct, I could say no more, no less! Had you rejected me, it would have been annihilation to love, but it would have been happier for us both—but would it? Ask your own heart, my wife, can you not now forgive, and may we not now be happy? Dearest, by the vows I pledged you in church, by the ring I placed on your finger, by the tortures I have undergone for you, by the sufferings which have made your cheek so pale, and brought tears to your dear eyes, by all that is deepest and purest in the love of man for woman, by all that is holy in truth, by all the sacred claims

which a husband has upon a wife, I conjure you to forgive and trust to me once more! What more can I say? could I help the past? If I have done you wrong, you see it was not me but circumstances did the wrong: we have been alike, though differently, the victims to circumstances. Again I say, forgive me. I mean to be the bearer of this letter myself, and shall not be far off when you have read it. Dared I, I would ask you to meet me at our old seat in the wood! and why not? You are my wife now by an indissoluble bond, and will you be less kind than when I owed all to your goodness? Meet me—”

I had read thus far hurriedly and eagerly, but these last words startled me; unconsciously I had complied with his request, and my first thought was to escape before Theodore could discover that I had been there. But I was too late. How long he had been watching me I do not know, but the moment I rose I was clasped in his arms. He could but have one idea, that I had come purposely to meet

him; and his delight and gratitude were natural. Although even in the hasty perusal which I had given to his letter I felt there was a something hollow and unsound in his way of putting things, I could not resist the tenderness of his expressions, and I was not unwilling to believe him more excusable than my judgment would have calmly pronounced him to be. To be loved, passionately, devotedly, entirely—there was a charm in that which bribed me to shut my eyes to what I could not approve, which bought off censure, and disarmed indignation.

And if his written words had this power, how much more had his voice, his look, his expressions of devotion.

Besides, he was my husband! The time was past when I ought to have turned away from the charm of his protestations; when choice was within my power, when I had a right to be distant, haughty, and suspicious. Now it was too late to practice control and reserve. All that was left for me was to

make the best terms of capitulation which I could, since, after all, I was his wife!

Selfish and self-willed, thoughtless, and capricious I had always been, and still remained; but I really do not think that I was obstinately resentful or malicious. I loved to tease, but I also loved to please, and I had sense enough to know that where the past was beyond recall, the best thing to do was to improve the present. Theodore loved me now; on this love depended all my future hopes of happiness; and I saw at a glance that if I would obtain over him the influence which I should certainly wish to possess, I must retain this love.

I had a vague consciousness that I had rivals; rivals in his country, his family, and his political connections. To these, so far as I could understand the past, I had already been sacrificed; for them I had been misled and duped; over these I resolved to triumph.

But I knew enough of his temper and his

fiery passions to feel that generous forgiveness and affectionate confidence would at this moment have more influence over him than the reproaches and suspicions which he must feel he deserved. We are too apt to hate those we have injured, and it flashed on me suddenly how forlorn and miserable I should be, if, after forfeiting so much to become his wife, I finally lost the love which had been the great temptation.

I believe my manner to my husband was just such a mixture of tenderness and reproach, of hurt feelings, and trustful love, as was sure to touch the heart of any one even moderately sensitive. And I must do Theodore the justice to say, that whatever faults he had (and they were by no means few) he had warm feelings also.

He was moved, deeply moved, as he saw my pale cheeks, and noticed how I yet retained traces of my severe illness; and his self reproaches for what he had cost me were passionate. Could I ever forgive him the

sufferings he had brought on me? Would not his memory be henceforth always associated with pain and sickness? He hated himself as he thought what he had made me endure.

My answer, I remember, was to the effect that impressions of bodily pain soon passed away, but that pain of mind left a deep indelible scar, which, we could only cover, not efface.

He looked at me anxiously and doubtfully, as if not quite sure of my meaning. I went on, finding him silent, and assured him that I would forgive, and could forget every throb of pain, every pang of fever; nay! every mental wound he had ever cost me, would he only assure me of one thing.

“And that?” said he, fixing on me a look of indescribable anxiety, perturbation, awe, and fear, as he half shrank from my side. I laid my hands upon his arm, and stooping, looked up into his face, as I spoke from an irrepressible impulse to know the worst.

“Theodore, have you not purposely deceived me?”

He turned away his head, as he clenched his hands together, but not soon enough to prevent my reading in his eyes such a cloud of remorse, such a consciousness of shame and wrong as went down deep into my heart, with a never-to-be-forgotten pang. Hurriedly I went on, as if I had always intended so to complete my sentence:—

“——, in saying that you love me!”

The answer now was what I had expected. Passionate protestations, and caresses, which cut short my investigation of his features. But I had seen enough—too much for my happiness. From that moment I had for my companion, the unspeakable torment of knowing that my worst fear was true; and that my husband, gloss it over as he would, had in truth, intentionally and willingly joined in a plot against me to obtain possession of my wealth. That he loved me now (and I did believe that) was a mere incident which he

could not help. He had not acted from love; he had not sought me from love. Had I been as repulsive, as unattractive as I felt myself to be the reverse, he would still have sought me, still have made me his wife; his emotions might have been different, but his conduct would have been the same. Instead of self reproach and pity for me, he would have experienced reluctance and concern for his own self sacrifice, but in all other respects we should have stood as we were.

Bitter, intensely bitter, and burning as these thoughts were, they could then only be felt, not spoken. I must not let Theodore read the secrets of my heart, or he might in fearing he had for ever forfeited my esteem cease to desire or strive for it. I stifled them then; at what a cost, with what an amount of torture let those guess whose spirit is as proud, and has been as deeply wronged, as mine. I believe I succeeded at the time in blinding him entirely; he recovered his composure and self-possession, and we were sitting together,

he pouring out, in low earnest tones, assurance after assurance of his love, when we were roused and startled by my own name, ejaculated from one behind us.

“Henrietta !”

It was my father’s voice, and starting to our feet we faced him.

I really think I may say I had never in my life seen my father angry till that moment. Easy and indolent, he seldom gave himself much trouble about us ; and things which vexed my mother, and would indeed have disturbed most parents, had been with him a mere subject for a laugh. Irritable and impatient he was occasionally, when servants or others worried and crossed him ; but nothing which in the least degree had ever served as a check on us ; or our whims. There was something very fearful in the cold, stony composure with which he spoke, coupled with the burning eye, the knitted brow, the changing complexion, and the trembling nerves.

I cannot remember his exact words, few

though they were; but the impression conveyed in tone and look can never be forgotten. I believe it was an ironical compliment to Theodore on the care he was taking of me, and a recommendation to me to return to the house.

My husband and I glanced at one another. What was to be done? I knew my father, at least I thought I did, and was the bravest of the two. I thought that now, at once to own the truth, would be the least evil, the shortest road to peace that we could adopt. I placed my hand within my husband's arm, and said as I pressed close to him :—

“Speak, Theodore—tell all.”

He hesitated, looking from me to my father uneasily.

“Oh yes! pray tell all,” said my father in the same manner, only perhaps there was less control over his voice. “But I think I can guess; let me spare you modesty, even as you have spared my paternal feelings. Say you are my daughter's lover. It is soon told.”

"And if I were," said Theodore, "would you give her to me, sir?"

"Superfluous courtesy," said my father, sharply, "you have already stolen her heart, or I should not find you here. Pshaw, Henrietta, child, go in and leave this man, this Italian adventurer," he took my hand as he spoke, to draw me away.

But Theodore clasped me round the waist.

"No, sir, it is too late! I cannot allow any interference now. Henrietta is my wife!"

Theodore had thrown aside all hesitation and fear, and stood up before my father, tall, graceful, proud—oh if looks, if personal advantages could avail ought for happiness, I should never have rued the day which made me his.

My father stepped back a pace and looked at us! I am glad that such a moment can come only once in a life time. That look of indignant and incredulous enquiry thrilled through me.

"And who are *you*?" said he at last, after some moments silent survey.

"I am Theodore Mentesi Grey, descended by my father's side from a family of whom you have heard before."

"Grey," repeated my father; "I know no such people, no such name; it is some imposition, some cheat!—Henrietta, my child, do not trust him—it is not true, he is deceiving me; you are not his wife?"

"I am!"

How I had the power to speak at all I do not know. Perhaps it was the intensity of my miserable feelings which alone could have given the impulse; it was the death struggle of expiring hope and happiness. For it had seemed to me as if until this moment the evil of my choice had not really been irrevocable; until now I had not entirely realised what was the fate to which I had bound myself for life. I had entertained, unconsciously indeed, and vaguely, visions of a happy explanation, which was to smooth away all unwelcome

facts, to remove all clouds of doubt, and to make my marriage, not a matter of shame and repentance, but of joy and congratulation.

But that delusion was passed. At that moment I looked on my previous conduct, not with the flattering eyes of self-love, but with something of the stern judgment of an unprejudiced spectator. I saw the way before me, I saw the hopeless chasm between me and happiness. I saw that my choice lay between my husband and my family! no, why do I say choice! I had none now. It *had* been between the two, but I had chosen, and I must abide by it. Nay, more; it was not merely that I could not now retract, but I must not even own the wish to do so. Now, just when I had acquired a more accurate comprehension of his character, just as I had fully appreciated how little he deserved my love and trust, just as I was conscious of the stinging agony which treachery and deception may occasion, with my heart secretly writhing under this knowledge, I must place my hand

in Theodore's, and declare with a steady voice, and a satisfied look, that this was my choice, and I would abide by it.

I did it; and I survived the effort. More than that, I survived my father's few, but bitter, words of anger and renunciation. He bade me go—go my own way—go with my husband! From that moment he disclaimed me. He had one daughter left, and she should not be led astray by the example of one who could thus degrade herself and family.

I tried to speak, but the words died on my lips in inarticulate murmurs; I had neither voice nor breath: everything became confused, and for a minute I was almost unconscious. When I opened my eyes I was alone with Theodore, who was looking exceedingly alarmed, as he supported me. I put him away, I turned from him, I would not reply to his affectionate enquiries. I had but one idea; what could I do, now my father had banished me from home? I covered my face

and tried to think, but I could form no rational plan.

At length my husband spoke.

"Henrietta, you don't mean to pass the rest of your life in this wood!"

The quiet, matter-of-fact manner of this interrogatory aroused me. Certainly I did not, and equally certainly, it was as well to think what I would do. I believe I looked the question.

"It's easily settled," he went on. "I am sure Sir Thomas will give us a home at Highanger for a few days, until we can form our own plans."

"And am I to go begging round the country for a lodging?" replied I indignantly.

"Propose a better plan," was his answer. "I will do what is most agreeable to you."

"I shall go home," I said, perversely. "My father's anger is certain not to last long, and by dinner-time he will have forgotten all about it. *You* can go back to Highanger as you came."

"Thank you. I shall not go without my wife!"

I turned and looked at him with amazement. The calm, decided tone startled me.

"No, Henrietta," he continued, in the same way, "whilst our marriage continued a secret, it was well for you to remain with your family, but now I claim you; and you heard, your father will not resist the claim."

I was silent. He looked at me anxiously.

"Do you repent?" said he at last.

"Oh, Theodore, do you think I can leave my home thus abruptly, without preparation, without even a farewell to my own sister, and go without regret?"

"Then let us compromise it," said he, kindly. "Go up to your friends at the Grange. See your sister; have an explanation with them; and by five o'clock I will be there to take you back to Highanger."

"And Sir Thomas?" said I; "are we to take him by storm?"

"He expects us," was his quiet reply.

“Expects us !” I retorted, affronted. “What ground has he to do that? Am I always to be planned and plotted about, as if I were a child, a bauble, a mere toy !”

“Now, Henrietta, do try and be reasonable, if you can. What can be more natural than for our friend to suppose that I should some day, and not a distant one, bring home my wife. And that, under our circumstances, he has placed his house and establishment at our service, need not make you angry surely. Go back there with me, and we can remain until your friends are reconciled, our affairs settled, and our own home decided on.”

It was reasonable, certainly; and it was kind of Sir Thomas to be so thoughtful for me. Yet there were some feelings in my mind which made me feel more annoyed than pleased. I never could bear to be dictated to; I had never been used to it. Even from childhood I had been the manager and mistress of the whole family, and I was offended that Theodore should have ventured to arrange

his measures without consulting me. It reminded me that I was no longer my own mistress, no longer free and independent; a most unwelcome notion, and one to which I was always trying to shut my eyes.

I answered, pettishly enough, that I would much rather go home; it would be so very inconvenient and strange to go off all of a sudden in this way.

"No," said he, decidedly, "I cannot allow you to do that."

"Not allow!" I repeated, surprised enough at his language.

"Just that," he replied, quite firmly. "After the words your father used to me, and of me, I cannot allow my wife to go back there. He insulted me, Henrietta; and can you suppose me so devoid of feeling as calmly to suffer such an insult unmoved? For your sake I will give you a few hours to meet and take leave of your sister, but I forbid you to go to Fairy Hill, and this evening I take you

home. Henceforth you belong to me, and I am not going any longer to defer the claim."

New and strange was such language to my ears; ominous for the future it sounded. I had forgotten that Theodore could feel anything but love and gratitude. It had not occurred to me that he might be angry at my father's words; that he might wish to separate me from my family, either from distrust of their influence, or indignant pride at their suspicions; or that from one of the commonest sentiments of human nature, having deeply injured my father, he should be implacable in his resentments.

I sat silent and stupified.

"If you do not like this plan," said he in a softer voice, after watching me some time, "Come back with me at once to Highanger. I will order a carriage in the village, for I have only a horse here now."

No, I could not do that. To drive off with him in the face of day in a hack-chaise, as

if I were eloping—*that* was a disgrace to which I could not submit.

Theodore was more patient with my perverseness than I had any reason to expect; yet he grew irritated at last. He started up and stood before me.

“Henrietta, one or other of these plans you must adopt, and that without delay! and since you are so determined against the last I mentioned, I presume you intend to comply with the first. Come then at once, there is no time for farther delay. I cannot leave you here alone, and I cannot remain longer here myself. Come, I say!”

And stooping he took my hands in his, and raised me with an air of determination I dared not resist. I was overpowered and half frightened; but my compliance was as sullen as possible. It was wrung from me by necessity. I felt, as he said, that he could not leave me alone in the wood with any regard to my comfort, but I was not quite so sure that he would not, if I provoked him much

more. We walked on together in profound silence, taking a winding path through the wood which led up to the lawn of the Grange. It was a distance of nearly half a mile, but the way was private, and I really could not bring myself to go by the straighter, but more open, road in common use.

At length, I said, just as we had almost reached the lawn:—

“I presume you are not coming into the house with me!”

“Not if you will promise me on your honour that I shall find you there when I return, and ready to go with me. Otherwise I shall go in and explain my wishes to Mr. Suffield himself.”

I was forced to make him the promise; he was softened then, and made me in return a thousand protestations of love, and anxiety for my happiness. I went forward alone, he remained to watch me until I entered the Grange, when he turned his steps to the village.

CHAPTER VI.

Children who have much offended,
A too indulgent father, in great shame,
Penitent, and yet not daring unattended
To go into his presence at the gate,
Speak with their sister, and confiding wait,
Till she goes in before and intercedes.

GOLDEN LEGEND.

I PASSED in front of the windows of the usual morning sitting room; they were open, and I looked in. Lady Suffield was there alone. I rushed forwards, and threw myself upon her neck. My sullen calmness had quite given way, and my sobs and tears relieved me, though they alarmed her a little. She had enjoyed some experience of my wayward fancies certainly, and knew how to treat them in general; but on this occasion, my grief was

not only passionate, it was deep; I had cause for my trouble of mind. What a life was before me; what vexation, what distress, what uncertainty! My father's anger might end in a total separation from my family, especially if it was encountered in the tone which Theodore had used. Unsupported by them, how should I succeed in detaching my husband from his political associations, or in lessening the influence which his mother and sister still possessed; and that their influence was antagonistic to my own, I knew by one of those strong internal convictions which seize on us whether we will or not.

And Theodore himself! every now and then, I caught glimpses of his character which made me doubt if I had ever yet read it rightly; and caused me a cold shudder as I looked forward to our future life. My confidence in him was gone; he had deliberately robbed me, and the conviction of this fact, gave me new views of other parts of his conduct.

My own injured feelings had at first prevented my seeing the whole iniquity of the scheme to which I was a victim ; but now it flashed on me all at once. Professions of convictions, alleged changes of faith, made only to deceive ; solemn vows deliberately broken ; a whole system of hypocrisy carried on for months ; and all for the most hateful motives—the mere desire of gain. Was this the return for my trusting love ; the reward for the unhesitating sacrifice I had made for him ! Well might I weep, as I laid my head on Lady Suffield's shoulder, and refuse to be comforted. Hope and happiness seemed both dead together, and it was for happiness, temporal happiness, that I had hitherto lived. What was there left me now ?

It was a long time before I could say half a dozen words connectedly, but I did succeed at last in so far explaining myself, as to make her understand that my father was angry, and that I wanted to see Grace. She was very quick in putting things together, and instantly

guessed that it was in consequence of the fact I had last night confessed to her. She refused to send for Grace, however, until I was calmer, and that gave me a motive for self-control; by degrees I became rational, partly perhaps aided by having cried till I was tired and exhausted. Then I told her all that had passed.

I think at first she had some idea of mediating between me and my father, but she gave that up when she found there was a third person's temper to be considered. I dare say she felt that Italian passions were beyond her influence. She sent St. John, who luckily was in the house, down to Fairy Hill to fetch Grace, and meanwhile she said everything which affection and wisdom could prompt to make me take a right view of my situation and my present duties.

She did not try to deny the evils to which I had exposed myself, but she wanted to make me see that the only way to meet them with any chance of success, was to consider

them in the right spirit. Poor dear Lady Suffield! her wisdom, which at the time might have seemed thrown away, was perhaps of use to me in after years, but certainly I cannot ascribe it to her influence that I grew calmer and more cheerful. I believe it was simply my levity of mind. The same kind of temper which is easily and violently depressed, is also easily elevated and excited. My grief was gone for the present; I had wept it and talked it away, and before Grace came to the Grange I had really regained my usual tone.

I resolved to tell her myself what had happened, and what was about to happen; but wishing to enjoy this, our last interview, as I found her quite unsuspecting, I deferred speaking until the hour of our parting must draw near.

We spent that afternoon like a couple of merry children, she because she was really happy, I from re-action of spirits. My gaiety, although as unreal, as unsubstantial as the foam on the wave, was at least as sparkling and

winning in appearance. St. John, although he did not know all, looked at me with surprise, and I constantly met the anxious glance of his mother's kind dark eyes whichever way I turned.

Hour after hour I put off an explanation which I felt would cloud my sister's cheerfulness and sink her heart, until at length I found that but fifteen minutes remained until the time named by my husband for his appearance. The thought rushed on me all at once, I felt I must speak then, and without pause I made a desperate effort.

I put my arm round her, and said suddenly—

“ Grace, I am going to leave you ! ”

She exclaimed. Of course she guessed any thing but the real facts ; and so she asked if I should leave her before she left me. I believe she, like every body else, had expected me to marry Sir Thomas Fenton. I told her yes, I was going to leave her directly, that very day, within an hour or less. Then she

turned very pale and said why? and then she tried to laugh and told me not to frighten her by idle talking; she was foolish.

"I don't want to frighten you, dear Grace, and don't make yourself unhappy about me; but I am not joking; no nor feeling at all inclined to joke. Grace, I am married!"

"Oh! Henrietta!"

"It is true. St. John knows it, and his mother, and one or two other people; and now my father knows it also!"

"Who to?" she asked, in a low trembling voice. How her poor little heart was beating.

"Theodore Mentesi!"

"Oh!" Such an, oh! such a world of regret, and tender concern, and pity in her voice. How I loved her for it! There never was another creature like Grace. Presently she whispered: "When?"

"In London—before my illness."

She pulled my hand closer round her, and was silent for some time. Her next question was: "And papa?"

"Grace, he is very angry, as well he may be; and he has refused to see me again, so I must leave home, and you, and every thing. Theodore is coming presently to take me away."

She bent down her head, but I could both see and feel that she was crying.

"St. John will tell you all about it," I continued, "he has known it. I cannot explain all. Don't cry, Grace, we shall soon meet again!"

"I was thinking of all you must have suffered," she said, kissing me.

"Yes; it has cost me pain enough!"

"To be obliged to conceal it! and then to have to own it; and papa to be angry! Oh! Henrietta, how could you bear it all. Whatever reason you might have had for secrecy, was it not dreadful to confess it at last? And was that what made you ill in London; and is it this which has affected your spirits so lately? Oh! Henrietta, how could you?"

"My dear Grace, don't ask me how I could;

I really don't know. One thing has led to another; I never knew where I was, or what I was doing, until at last—"

I choked down a great sob; I did not want Grace to think me unhappy.

"And this M. Mentesi," said she, thoughtfully. "Henrietta, is he a Roman Catholic?"

"No; he has joined our Church."

"Oh, I am glad of that. But did you not say he was coming directly to take you away? Oh, Henrietta, how can I spare you?"

"I don't know, Grace, you must try and like him!" She might, perhaps, for she need not know what made me miserable.

"Perhaps I may," she said; but I could see that in her heart she laid on him the whole blame of the past. Blame which her own rectitude made her sensible was deserved, but which her sisterly affection prevented her ascribing to me.

We were sitting together out in the flower garden, in a spot, which although concealed

from observation, commanded a full view of the approach to the house. Our silence was interrupted by the sound of wheels; a noise which made my heart sink. Grace clung to me and trembled. I tried to be cold and careless. We were right; it was Sir Thomas Fenton's carriage, and no doubt conveyed my husband. I sat still and silent, yet feeling a sort of curiosity to know what would come next, as if it all concerned somebody else.

St. John came to us.

"Henrietta, you are waited for!" I saw that he had some difficulty in speaking the words, and that he was looking with anxious concern at Grace's tears and agitation. She threw her arms round me, and her sobs came thick and fast.

"My dearest sister, where are you going?"

I told her only to Highanger; that I would soon see her again; and I whispered, "When St. John has explained all, speak to my father for me; make him forgive me, Grace; I trust

to you. He only knows the fact, and none of the reasons—the excuses—will you plead for me?”

“Will I not, with my whole heart?”

“You had better come,” said St. John, taking a hand of each, and gently trying to part us.

“I will not be hurried,” I answered, with a flash of proud determination, at which he shook his head reproachfully. I did not care. I lingered on, and kissed Grace again and again.

Then Lady Suffield came out too.

“My dear child, are you ready?”

“Ready, no; I have nothing ready. I cannot go, Lady Suffield. I cannot leave Grace. It is nonsense, tell M. Mentesi to come back again to-morrow.”

“Fie, fie, Henrietta,” said Grace, trying to speak cheerfully. “But we do not think so ill of M. Mentesi as to suppose he would listen to such a message. Now, go, dear sister, or he will have to fetch you himself;

and perhaps I need not see him to-day. I would rather not."

"Let him wait," I said perversely. "I cannot go yet."

"He said he could not wait," answered Lady Suffield, gravely.

"Nay, if he cannot, he may go his way in peace. I can wait very well. My dear Lady Suffield, how am I to go away without an article from my wardrobe; not a slipper—not a handkerchief—not even a bracelet, except what I have on me at this moment. The thing is simply impossible. Just go back and tell him so."

"I have provided for all that," replied she; "knowing you had forgotten it, I ventured to send for your maid and such articles as you would require for a few days. It is all ready."

"Cruel Lady Suffield," I said, reproachfully, "to cut away my best excuse."

"Come," she repeated. I clasped Grace in my arms, and gave her one long kiss; a kiss

into which I strove to put the tenderness of years, the hallowed memories of home and youthful happiness; then I drew up my figure, and crossed the lawn with a resolute step. Yes, there was Theodore waiting in the drawing room with a troubled look on his brow, which I did not like. It cleared off, however, at the sight of me, and there was no mistaking the glow of love and delight as he advanced hastily. He tried to draw me away from Lady Suffield, but I clung perversely to her arm, and gave her all my attention.

“Come and see me to-morrow,” I said to her imploringly.

And then Theodore reiterated the invitation with a grace of manner peculiar to him. Then I began to beg that she would let Clara or Mary go back with me now to Highanger, which absurd request was treated exactly as it deserved. I lingered on. Theodore was more patient and indulgent than I expected; more than I wished, for I rather desired to provoke him, and he would not be provoked.

Half laughing, half crying, I stood there, talking nonsense, until at last Lady Suffield herself hinted that I had better not make much more delay, and my husband, thanking her for her kindness, again endeavoured to lead me away. Then all remnant of fortitude left me, I threw my arms round her neck, and in an agony of tears and sobs, implored her to take pity on me, and obtain from my father the forgiveness, without which all other trouble would be doubled. She whispered kind promises and prudent cautions, and whilst the excess of my grief made me quite incapable of supporting myself, she placed me on Theodore's arm, who led me away, blinded by tears, and choked by sobs of regret and contrition.

And so I passed as a bride from my father's hall, and went out a homeless refugee, indebted for an asylum to the kindness of one on whom I had no claim. Was this what might have been looked for as the fate of the proud, the beautiful heiress ?

Now that I have lived long enough to see the strange contradictions, the contrasts, the unexpected turns to which human affairs are liable, such a termination to my wilful career seems quite natural ; but it was not so then, and, at the moment, the difference between what I was, and what I might have been, was equally strange and overwhelming. I did not feel that it was my own fault, but rather deemed myself the victim to inevitable necessity. I fancied that I was more to be pitied than blamed !

One piece of advice Lady Suffield had impressed on me to some effect, which was to refrain from reproaches about the past, if I valued my future happiness. Forgiveness, that was what she urged on me ; for I too had much to be forgiven ; and I did resolve to act on this principle from motives of prudence, at least for the present.

There were so many questions still to be decided, so many wishes to be gratified, I was so much in my husband's power that it

was, I could see, important to avoid all irritating and unpleasant topics ; and, indeed, however much my confidence in Theodore had been shaken, his influence over me, when we were together, was as strong as ever. I could not resist the fascination of his manner, nor the charm of his passionate devotion. When Sir Thomas Fenton met me with a cordial, though grave welcome at Highanger, there was nothing in our manners to each other not perfectly suitable to our relative situations.

It was very awkward and embarrassing. I suppose few brides have made such a débüt in matrimony as I did. Actually we had not yet decided on the name by which I was to be called ; although, in my own mind, I had pretty well determined to use the English one — Mrs. Mentesi Grey. That would not sound ill, and I had a fancy that using it would, in some degree, prevent the discovery of how I had been deceived.

I suppose Sir Thomas thought the same, for, to my great satisfaction, he adopted this

designation; and, somehow, it was tacitly agreed amongst us, that henceforth we were to be known as Mr. and Mrs. Mentesi Grey!

Highanger was all new to me, and it was a very pretty place; so after dinner we went out to see a little of the gardens and pleasure grounds, which happily afforded some relief from the uncomfortable and embarrassing feelings which distressed me. It was no fault of our host that we were not at ease, for nothing could be kinder than Sir Thomas was to us both.

When we returned to the drawing-room, he asked me to pour out the tea, and was going to ring for lights; but the glow from the western sky was still so bright, and there was something so comfortable to my feelings in the partial obscurity of the room, that I begged him not to do so. I think we began to get more unreserved as the twilight deepened. I remember Theodore was leaning on the arm of my chair, as he sat by me; Sir

Thomas was closer to the table, at which I nominally was presiding, although I left it all to him, in fact, when he said :—

“Mrs. Grey, I place my whole establishment at your disposal, for any length of time convenient to you. Pray consider it as your own, and invite any friends you may wish to see, except—Theodore, you must not be affronted at my making the exception—except political connections from Italy! You know my reasons for protesting against them.”

Theodore laughed as he answered that he would not have Henrietta prejudiced against his own countrymen ; but I could see it was an uneasy laugh, and cost him an effort. However, he added with a better grace directly after :—

“But I am not likely to want any visitors whilst we remain here. Society would be an interruption, a nuisance, a bore, at present. I am only too happy in retirement like this.”

“I would rather still leave the whole responsibility to you, Sir Thomas,” I replied,

"much as I am obliged to you for the authority you offer to repose in me."

"That is not possible," was his answer, "I start early to-morrow morning for Scotland; so early, indeed, that I must take leave of you over night, as we shall not meet again."

"Going away!" I exclaimed, quite astonished, and not entirely pleased at the idea.

"Yes, I only waited until your husband had his proper companion; having brought him down here, of course I could not in courtesy leave him alone; but I always proposed, so soon as you joined him, to go to the north."

"You cannot deceive me, Sir Thomas," I exclaimed, quickly. "It is your good-nature to us drives you away. But indeed you had much better stay here."

"No, no," he said, laughingly; "if there was any good-nature in the matter on my part, it was in remaining with Theodore whilst he was so dismal at being separated from you; but now all that is set right, and I am no

longer required, by the laws of romance, to play the part of compassionate friend and listener to the distracted lover, you must just let me go my own way, and fulfil an engagement which has been some time depending on your movements."

"I am very sorry," I replied, with more candour than consideration; "I would much rather you should stay with us."

"Mind she does not say that this time tomorrow, Theodore," exclaimed Sir Thomas; "it will be your own fault in that case. Indeed, my dear Mrs. Grey, I am extremely delighted that you ask me to remain; but I trust, when you have made the experiment, you will thank me as heartily for my absence as I do you for desiring my company. And now, as I have many things to do previous to my journey, I shall wish you good bye."

He held out his hand as he spoke. I gave him mine in silence, for I had too many feelings rising in my heart to find it easy to make an ordinary speech of compliment. He held

mine a little longer than politeness alone required.

“May you be happy!” said he, earnestly; “and remember, I have been your husband’s friend from boyhood, so you will always have a right to claim my services, and command my help, if needed. Theodore, mind you make her happy.”

There was an anxious, an almost distrustful glance in his eye, and tone in his voice, as he turned and took my husband’s hand, and shook it warmly; and then he went away, and I felt very, very sorry to part with him.

The next day we found ourselves undisputed rulers of Highanger; and for two or three days the novelty of the place, the beauty of the country, and the pleasure of Theodore’s society, really made me happy. Sir Thomas was right, before the next evening I was quite of his opinion; my husband’s unbounded devotion and kindness won me from all my wilful ways for the time. I forgot every cause of anger and grief; I loved him with

my whole heart—passionately, intensely ; and I believed that I only gave the same degree of affection that I received. I began to lose sight of the objects which I had formerly feared as rivals.

Caterina sent me several letters filled with Italian superlatives of affection and gratification ; the gratification I believed in entirely, for so soon as our affairs were settled she would become possessed of something between seven and eight hundred a year through my blind imprudence.

I declare I hardly dared think of this even then, it made me so indignant when I remembered how I had been led by her arts to enrich this odious girl. I could respect Madame Mentesi. She was consistent and true. She was extremely hurt and angry, almost broken hearted indeed at the conduct of her son ; his quitting her church and marrying cut her to the quick, and she could not forgive it. I pitied her, and could not help wishing to make it up with her if I could ; but my sister-in-law

I detested, and privately resolved that she, of all individuals, should be the one to whom Sir Thomas's exception should most rigorously apply.

So far as I know, indeed, I believe Madame Mentesi was the only one who acted with anything like honesty on the occasion. It was quite natural and excusable that she should be anxious to secure this inheritance for her children, and believing me to be likely to marry soon, it was very prudent to be on the spot to assert their claims. This was her idea in coming to England, the rest of the plot I have every reason to believe originated with her son and daughter, especially with the latter, who so soon as she had fathomed my character, speculated on Theodore's chances of attaching me, and lent herself heart and soul to the plan.

Poor Madame Mentesi was as deeply wounded at her son's conduct as my father was offended with me. We were alike cast off by our only surviving parent.

For two or three days I bore this very well, but after that time I grew impatient of neither hearing nor seeing anything from home. I had expected Lady Suffield to come over to Highanger to see me, and had even flattered myself that she would bring Grace also. Disappointed in this, I suggested going to the Grange to see what was the reason or motive of a silence and absence more painful to me than I cared to own.

Theodore, however, put a decided negative on this plan; absolutely refused to let me go, notwithstanding every endeavour on my part to persuade or coax him. Neither smiles nor frowns, neither entreaties nor remonstrances had the smallest effect. It grieved him deeply, he said, to thwart me; anything in his power and compatible with his sense of right he would do; but every feeling of honour and propriety was against allowing his wife to take this step, and opposing passive resistance to my urgency and impetuosity, he remained as immoveable as the house itself.

We quarrelled, but that did no good ; and the worst of it was that I was obliged to yield and make concessions. I depended on him, and his temper was the most self-willed of the two. My proud sense of right would not allow me to let the world know that there was any difference between us. I did not mean to be pitied, I dreaded lest it should be whispered that I had reason to repent my choice. Under such circumstances I suppose the person who cares for appearances must yield to the one who defies them ; and Theodore, partly from ignorance of English customs, partly from real indifference to gossiping remarks, was never to be swayed by the question—what will people think ?

Besides, I loved him ; my love was not of that tame submissive sort which makes a woman a willing slave, ready to endure any amount of unkindness, and love her tyrant all the more ; but it made me miserable to quarrel with him, and after punishing myself a whole day by a sullen fit, which I had great

difficulty in keeping up, I finally had to humble myself, and beg pardon like a naughty child.

We had just arrived at this agreeable conclusion when the sound of the door bell aroused my attention, and in a few minutes the much wished for appearance of Lady Suffolk delighted my eyes, as I fondly entertained an immediate hope that she was the bearer of a message of forgiveness and reconciliation from my father. The intelligence she communicated was to this effect, although some of these particulars were not ascertained by me until a much later period.

CHAPTER VII.

"'Tis the sound
Of their own hearts they hear, half full of tears,
Which are like crystal cups half filled with water,
Responding to the pressure of a finger
With music sweet, and low, and melancholy."

GOLDEN LEGEND.

POOR dear Grace went home that evening in a very depressed state of mind. Although St. John softened everything to her, and tried to make the future appear as bright as circumstances would allow, he was too really unhappy about me and my position to be able to avoid communicating his uneasiness to one who understood his tones, and unuttered feelings as well as my sister did. When they sat

down to dinner at Fairy Hill, not a word was said by my father regarding my absence, except that he requested Mrs. Brook to take the head of the table. She had sufficient discretion at that time to avoid asking any questions, for it was impossible for anyone with the slightest observation not to discover that there was a cloud on his brow which must have some extreme cause for its origin.

Grace was longing for an opening to introduce my name, but of course it could not be done before a third person, and either by accident or design her father gave her no opportunity of speaking to him alone. This total silence on the subject of my sudden disappearance, this complete ignoring my very existence, was terrible to Grace. She was brave enough to my father in his ordinary moods, and had he been hasty, angry in words, had he complained, had he reproached, had he blamed me, she would have known how to treat the matter, and how to bring him round.

But never had she heard him speak in such tones of cold indifference as when he replied to Mrs. Brook, who had ventured in the course of the evening to enquire if anyone was to sit up for me. Poor Grace longed to pursue the subject, and her eyes filled with irrepressible tears; which probably her father saw, for although he did not say anything on the subject, he spoke to her in a kind, fond voice, with something of huskiness indicative of subdued emotion.

A few minutes after he rose, pushed away the table on which his tea-cup was standing, and going up to Grace, he took her face between his two hands, kissed first one cheek and then the other, and held her a little while in silence.

"Good night, my child," said he, after a pause, "good night and bless you, my love! I am going to the study, and have letters to write. Don't let me be interrupted."

"Oh, papa," she said, pulling him down close, "listen one moment; Henrietta—"

But at the mention of my name he drew away decidedly.

“Grace, as you value my love and blessing, never mention her name to me again. I have renounced her. She has chosen her own fate—let her go !”

“Oh ! papa, papa !—please don’t say such things !” exclaimed Grace, in an agony of tears.

“My child, I would do nothing to distress you, if I could help it ; but, for your own sake as well as for many other reasons, this must be so. I will not expose my precious Grace to the contamination of such characters as this Italian refugee and his sister.”

“But my sister, my own, my only sister ; forgive—forgive her !”

“Never ! she has misled, deceived, betrayed my confidence ; she has led me to deceive, or at least mislead others ; she has wilfully trifled with—don’t make me talk of it, or I shall say what I may perhaps repent hereafter. Good night, Grace ! and never, never name her again.”

In spite of my sister's tears, of her clinging arms, and imploring kisses, my father left her, and Grace laid her head upon my work-table and cried for a long while.

It was a great thing for her that she had St. John to look to for advice, as well as comfort. She could rest on his judgment, temper, and affection for me. If any increase of devotion on his part was possible, I have no doubt but that she had it, and as, in reality, her loss in me was more one of feeling than fact, she was not actually a sufferer, except so far as her affectionate temper made her suffer. I believe St. John recommended her for the present to say no more to my father; opposition was likely to irritate him into greater hardness and determination; in time the loss of my society would make itself felt more than he would now believe, and in some moment of softness more might be won by a few words, than could now be extorted by hours of supplication or argument. Something, too, might be gained, they hoped, by

my brother's influence. Stuart and his wife were expected very soon, and they might interfere for my sake.

They were to come to the Grange so soon as my father moved into it; for the wedding was to follow immediately. In fact the two families were to change dwellings for a few days, in order that Lady Suffield and her daughters might be present at the ceremony, after which she was to leave the country entirely. All this had long been settled, and my secession from the family group made no alteration in the plans.

"But, Lady Suffield," exclaimed I vehemently, when she had told me of such of these particulars as she knew at the time, "it's impossible that my father can really mean to cast me off altogether; he must allow somebody to reason with him—you must talk to him yourself—I cannot, cannot submit to be deserted like this!"

She was silent.

"You will, you promised me you would

plead for me !” I added impatiently and reproachfully.

“ I would do anything I could, dear child ; but some things are beyond my control.”

“ Have you tried ?” I exclaimed in the same tone.

“ Yes,” was the brief response.

“ Oh, Lady Suffield—”

My breath went away, and I could say no more.

“ My dear Henrietta, my poor child,” said she, kissing me tenderly : “ your father is most deeply hurt and grieved. Did you ever make him angry before ?”

“ Oh, no, never—I do not think he can be really angry. Besides, what have I done ? nothing but what I had a perfect right to do. I was my own mistress. I had my own happiness to consult ; why should he or anyone be aggrieved, because I took my own way. I have always been used to my own way, ever since I was a baby.”

“Unfortunately that is true,” was her grave reply.

“But it makes it the more hard to be thwarted now,” persisted I, thinking myself deeply injured.

“No doubt; it is not a good preparation for enduring contradiction, or vexation of any kind; but it is not yourself, it is your father whom you have to consider now. He is angry, and I do not see very clearly how he is to be pacified.”

I wanted to know what had passed between them; but Lady Suffield was very reluctant to enter into particulars. She told me that she had said everything that she could in my favour; but that he listened so unwillingly, and said so little in reply, that she could not flatter herself her remonstrances had produced the slightest benefit. I prayed to have the words he had used repeated to me; but when she complied, I gained little satisfaction from that. He said Henrietta had chosen her own

fate, and must abide by it. She urged my thoughtlessness and inexperience had, in some degree, made me the dupe of others; his answer was that if I had been duped, I had merely been foiled by my own weapons; that cunning intrigues, and prolonged deception were not the result of thoughtless impulses.

When Lady Suffield repeated and dwelt on my grief at his anger, and my wish to be forgiven, he replied coldly that I should sooner forget my grief than he would the cause of it, and added presently, "I warned her from the first against those Italians, and she scorned my warning. See the degrading consequences of her wilful intimacy; but never shall my other child, with my consent, be exposed to communication with those whom I have such reason to distrust and dislike."

I was almost frantic with grief when I found the result of her efforts. But still I insisted on it that something must be done. It was impossible that my father's doors could

really be shut upon me ; it was incredible that he could be so resolutely and absolutely bent on rejecting me. That Grace, my only sister, could be married and I not present, was preposterous. Something must be done to prevent it. I declared I would go back with Lady Suffield myself, insist on seeing my father, and induce him to listen to reason and justice.

Lady Suffield declined to take me, and my husband refused to let me go. He came in just as I was arguing on the expediency of the plan, and put a decided negative on the proposal. Angry as I was, I yet was forced to conceal the feeling ; besides pride, I had another motive to be quiet ; I wanted to see how my friend behaved to my husband. I could soon perceive that she did not like him ; however charming his manners, they could not overcome the strong prejudice which his previous conduct had raised against him. She did not stay long after Theodore came back to us ; and I am convinced that of his whole

conduct the part which pleased her most was his having been so long absent as to allow us this uninterrupted intercourse.

I sent a note back by her. It was no use writing to Grace, for I could not be sure who would read it; so I preferred addressing St. John.

“If you do not wish me to go out of my mind, I implore you to use your influence to procure a reversal of my sentence from my father. I cannot endure to be thus thrown off; I must be re-instated before your marriage. If he knew Theodore he would not indulge in this absurd and unnatural prejudice. Try what you can do, and come over and see me. I cannot exist without some intercourse with those most dear to me.”

Such was my note to St. John. I had been so entirely accustomed to be obeyed, that I had no comprehension of such an irritating difficulty as finding a will more resolute than mine. The longing to return to my father's house, which was at the moment my ruling

motive, would have had no existence but that I could not gratify it. I might have gone away for months with indifference, knowing I could return at any time ; but a week's separation seemed to me unendurable, because my wishes were apparently unattainable.

St. John's judgment, I believe, was entirely against any farther interference. He thought opposition only excited my father to additional obstinacy, and he would have refused all compliance with my request, but for Grace. He could not resist her pleadings, and accordingly ventured to open the subject.

They had reason to repent of their compliance ; that is, St. John would have repented, had he been like me, one of those weak impulsive characters which lead to actions without principle, and results which one way or other were sure to originate regret. But this was not his case ; and having once decided that it was right to run the risk of the attempt, he really, I believe, took the

consequences patiently as a trial to be borne, not repiningly as unmerited discomfort.

My father was irritated at his representations, and not only absolutely refused to listen to any remonstrances or entreaties for me, but he wanted St. John to promise that he would break off all communication with me himself, and never suffer Grace, when she became his wife, either to meet or to write to me.

St. John positively refused to make any such agreement. He declared he should be as anxious as my father could possibly wish to keep his wife from unworthy or unsafe associates; that amongst these he was quite ready to class the Italian family with whom her sister had so unfortunately connected herself; but that the ties of blood were sacred in his eyes, and he could not sanction a renunciation of a sister's claims such as Mr. Moore desired. Over Grace's safety and well-being he would watch with the more anxiety from her helplessness; but her moral

safety must depend on fulfilling aright her duties, and to cast off a relative given her by Heaven, and promise unconditionally to refrain from all communication, was conduct which could bring no blessing and no comfort with it.

Respectfully as St. John spoke, his words, I believe, enraged my father, and he declared in the most angry manner, that unless this promise were previously made, Grace should never become the wife of one who judged so unwisely, and showed such unconcern for her well-being.

This threat, however it might alarm or grieve St. John Suffield, could not shake his purpose; he was firm in what he believed right, and after a very stormy scene on my father's side, and a most painful one to him, he left the house, with a reiterated assurance from my father that all must be over between him and Grace.

He came to Highanger and told me this himself. I thought I should have gone dis-

tracted at the intelligence. Oh, my wild, blind folly, what a curse had it brought upon all nearest and dearest to me! Grace, my darling sister! what, was her heart to be broken too by my self-will? I could not bear the thought; and passionately I implored him to retract, to give my father his own way, to promise anything, everything, rather than cause her another moment's agony such as she must be now enduring.

I might as well have tried to overthrow one of the giant oaks under which we were walking as have endeavoured to move St. John from a resolve formed on a settled conviction of right. Gentle as he was, quiet, patient, he had a firmness, a stability of purpose, as rare as it was admirable.

No, he would not, he dared not yield in this matter; it would not add to Grace's happiness, it would not do my father any good; the thing itself was wrong, the promise he exacted was one at which common sense and natural affection alike revolted;

and to endeavour to secure her happiness on so false a foundation, would be indeed building a house upon the sand.

“No, Henrietta, no; we can wait in patience, and trust and hope for a blessing in the end; but how could we expect one, if purchased by renouncing sisterly affection, and encouraging your father in —” he stopped abruptly; I knew what he meant: then he went on again:

“Henrietta, we can never win the blessing of God by ceasing to deserve it, or gain the permanent friendship of man by making Him our enemy; and, without His blessing and love, what earthly lot can satisfy us?”

Alas for me! that such principles had not guided me; alas for my friends, for all connected with me. Yet I never forgot those words, and in after years of sadness and repentance, how often they have rung in my ears I cannot say.

At the time, I know I was irritated with the firmness of St. John; perhaps it was the pain-

ful consciousness of the contrast of the man I loved as a brother, and the one I ought to love as a husband, which increased my impatience ; perhaps it was my own undefined sense of inferiority in moral motives, and the want of fixed principles in my own conduct. At any rate I was wayward and fretful ; I even ventured to accuse him of coldness, of obstinacy, of indifference. Oh how good and patient he was ; and that, too, when his heart must have been tortured by the trouble in which my own self-will alone had involved him and Grace. Because he did not reproach me, I was angry with him ; he might so justly have said, “ this pain is your doing, Henrietta ; your imprudence and obstinacy have separated me from Grace,” and he did not even look it !

My urgent entreaties, as I said, had no effect on him, nor my petulant remonstrances, nor my angry reproaches, except to add a deeper shade of sadness to his sorrow.

“ Henrietta, you know you do not mean

what you say," was his reply to my expostulations. "You ask me to give this promise, without at all intending that I should keep it. You deceive yourself with the idea that your father will speedily relent, and that all will be forgotten; or else you vaguely imagine that if I only obtain Grace as my wife, the terms on which I now agree may be speedily consigned to oblivion by us all. In short what you wish me to do, is to make a promise which all the time I trust I shall not be expected to keep. This I cannot, will not do. Promises are too sacred to be thus prevaricated with. Only let us act honestly and uprightly—no, now Henrietta, be patient, pray!"

The adjuration was of no avail. Although I knew him to be my best friend, although in my heart I clung to him more warmly even than to one of my own kin, I took a wild pleasure in paining him, and turning away indignantly I left him on the spot.

He left Highanger; I saw him ride off as I

stood at the window; I could then have run out, and thrown myself at his feet to beg his pardon, but it was too late. He was gone, and my last words to him had been unkind reproaches.

My husband found me in an agony of tears; no words of his could soothe me; my misery was too sullen, too selfish. I could not, I would not, try to forgive him the sorrow he had led me into; I turned with a shudder from his caresses, I repulsed every effort to win my confidence.

What was my astonishment when after I had persisted in resentment for twelve hours, he coldly announced to me the following morning, that business required his presence in London. I was sure it was a mere pretence to punish me for my ill-temper, so I concealed all emotion, expressed no curiosity, no concern regarding his absence; never even asked when he would return, or inquired where he would be in town.

My pride did not give way till he was ab-

solutely gone ; then abandoned by every one, desolate, miserable, I threw myself down in despair which left me hardly the power of rational reflection, and the next two days are a blank in my memory, presenting only images of tardy repentance, and unavailing regret.

CHAPTER VIII.

This happened many years ago.
I left my father's home to come,
Like Catherine to her martyrdom,
For blindly I esteemed it so.

GOLDEN LEGEND.

LETTERS came from my husband, cold, formal letters, informing me that he was at his mother's house, that business would detain him some days longer, and suggesting that if I wished, I might join him there. His mother had forgiven the parts of his conduct which had once pained her, and was now ready to receive his wife as her daughter!

Every proud feeling rebelled again as I read this; the temporary softness which his

hand writing had aroused, the longing for his society again to which the thought of his love had given birth died away into more determined coldness. What, take refuge with the family who had so deeply injured me; be received perhaps as a penitent and reformed transgressor, accept as a favour the patronage of Madame Mentesi and her daughter; throw myself at once into the circle from which I had fondly hoped to raise Theodore, and henceforth become merely the wife of an Italian refugee! Never! I answered that I preferred remaining where I was, adding that his business could in no way concern me, and I had never been accustomed to be in London at such an unfashionable season; if I left Highanger at all, it would be to go to Weymouth or some other place where I might probably find or make friends.

This was merely a taunt. I had not the smallest intention of leaving Highanger, nor any inclination for society; but I knew his unbounded jealousy of temper, and expected to

goad him, by the hint that I could amuse myself independent of him, into a speedy return to the place where I was at least safe from all Italian intruders.

Meanwhile, what were all my friends about? Lady Suffield, St. John, Grace, what were they doing, had they all abandoned me too? I had quitted St. John in unjust anger, would he resent it so far as to treat me as I deserved? They say that men do not dwell mentally on small injuries, those little acts of unkindness, forgetfulness, heedlessness which sometimes sting a woman's heart so deeply. I am quite sure that some do, and treasure up minute causes of irritation with a carefulness quite equal to anything feminine narrow-mindedness could exhibit. But of St. John I will do him the justice to say, that he seemed incapable of similar conduct. With him, to forgive was indeed to forget, and the minor grievances of life swept over his temper as little breezes over a glassy sea, faintly

ruffling and darkening it for a passing moment, and then disappearing for ever.

But I had been so very ungrateful, so unkind, so unjust ! could I be forgiven ? I had been selfish instead of sympathising, rebellious instead of repentant ; I had been angry at his patience, and indifferent to his sufferings. I could not have complained had I been left to myself, nor have wondered at the total withdrawal of his regard.

And yet I knew this would not be the case ! I had so entire a confidence in him that this painful suspicion was rejected as impossible. St. John would be as true to me as a friend, as he would be to Grace as a lover ; because it was his nature to be true in whatever he undertook. But the self-reproach which my conduct occasioned me, was in no degree mitigated by the conviction of his worth, and the certainty that my reproaches had been undeserved. Hasty and impetuous, I have passed my life in giving pain to those I loved

best; in repenting, and yet erring again. Why any one loved me at all I cannot now imagine; I am sure no one was the object of my affection or my friendship without having to experience in many ways how troublesome my love could be.

Well, these mournful retrospections are no use now. *I have* lived, and that life such as it was, cannot now be altered or amended by regrets of mine.

To return to my story. How many solitary days I passed at Highanger I cannot now exactly remember; it was a dreary time, and my health as well as spirits was beginning to fail; I was thinking of writing to Theodore to ask him to return to me, when one morning a gentle tap at the door, was followed by the entrance of Grace and Lady Suffield.

My surprise took away my breath and my speech. I could do nothing at first but kiss them with smothered exclamations, and sobs of joy. Grace also was too happy to be loquacious; she hung about me with half

uttered words of fondness; she smoothed my hair, she caressed my face with her soft fingers; she murmured low sentences of pleasure and deep heart-felt delight.

But when reason and recollection took the place of emotion, and we began to exchange consecutive sentences, my anxiety to know why and how they came, was speedily put into words.

It appeared then that the forgiveness which neither Grace nor St. John could extort from my father for my deception, had been obtained for me by the intervention of another whose kindness had already made itself felt in our concerns.

Sir Thomas Fenton had exerted himself once more in our behalf. I believe, indeed, that one principal reason of my father's extreme indignation at my conduct, had been the disappointment of his wishes as connected with that gentleman. He had quite made up his mind that Sir Thomas intended to be his son-in-law, and was equally decided that he

was in every way an eligible *parti*. Accordingly he had, under this conviction, allowed himself in acts and words of encouragement, from which, had he known the real state of the case, he would have carefully abstained. Quite unaware that the baronet had been so long in my confidence, and little suspecting that he had been a witness to my unlucky and unwise marriage, my father, no doubt, felt as a man of keen feelings must do in having been the means, however innocently, of misleading another. He felt his honour compromised by what had passed, and his anger was great in proportion.

An explanation with Sir Thomas himself produced the effect of softening his resentment. He found that whatever deception I had practised, I had not been wilfully trifling with the heart of a very excellent man, and he was more ready to forgive me my undutiful conduct towards himself, than he would have been this kind of injury to his friend. It was less irritating to have been

himself deceived by me, than to have been made the medium of deceiving and misleading another.

I never quite knew how Sir Thomas learnt the unfortunate turn my affairs had taken, or the distress in which my conduct had involved my sister; but I rather think it was some direct communication from my father himself. However that might have been, he returned from Scotland, had a long interview at the Grange with my father, of which the particulars never transpired, and eventually had the satisfaction of seeing St. John restored to his place beside Grace, and being assured that she should go over to Highanger the next day, with full pardon for the past, and an invitation to Theodore and myself to return with her.

Oh, how my rebel heart rose and swelled with triumph at this intelligence. I saw at a glance the advantage I should gain in treating with my husband. I was no longer the abandoned and neglected daughter; and,

supported by my family, I need not be the lonely, forsaken, insulted wife.

I do not think Grace was very sorry when, in reply to her questions, I told her Theodore was in London; she half uttered an exclamation which had more pleasure than regret in its tone, until she checked herself by the thought of how lonely I must have been.

Lady Suffield looked enquiringly at me, and I soon saw that she penetrated to the fact that there was a shadow over our matrimonial felicity; but dear, innocent Grace, with her entire and trusting love, never for a moment suspected evil, or fancied unkindness.

However, the absence of my husband, from whatever cause, and the return of Sir Thomas into the country, were sufficient excuses for my readiness to vacate Highanger, and take shelter under my father's roof. There was another motive, too. I had found to my astonishment, that I was actually in want of money; and though I knew that the inconvenience would be only temporary, still it was

an inconvenience ; and such was my ignorance of business matters, that I really did not know how to remedy it. My father, I hoped, would set all this right.

Gladly and readily, therefore, I gave orders to have my things prepared for a transit to the Grange, and I believe I should, in my utter thoughtlessness, have gone away and left the whole charge of our temporary *ménage* there, to fall on Sir Thomas Fenton, had not a few words of Lady Suffield reminded me that some arrangements must be made with the house-keeper, as well as some explanation be offered to my husband.

To Theodore, therefore, I addressed a few lines, containing an intimation of my change of plans ; and leaving them to be forwarded with the bills, which of course must be sent to him, I quitted Highanger in a flutter of spirits, in which natural affection struggling with offended love and proud resentment against my husband, was counterbalanced by a sense of shame at my past follies, and dread

of the censure which my present situation might call forth.

Indeed, when the first joyous emotion at the restoration to my family had subsided, shame and self-reproach became too powerful to be silenced or smothered. The thought of all I had been led to do, the deceit I had practised, the rash step I had taken, the duplicity with which I had been misled, and the fraud to which I had been the victim, rose before me with a force that humbled my pride, and silenced my tongue. I was returning home, the pardoned child, but I was also the disappointed sufferer from my own wilful ways. The acquaintance with these Italians, entered into, and carried on as it had been against the advice and wishes of every real friend, had been fatal indeed; my obstinacy and caprice had brought their own punishment; but I was not yet sufficiently humbled to acknowledge this with candour, except to myself. If I had lost the reality of happiness, I yet struggled to preserve the appearance of it;

and was as unwilling to own myself always in the wrong, as if by deceiving others, I could cheat myself into the belief that I had no reason to regret what I had done.

In short, I was not penitent for my faults. I was only sorry that they had not made me happy; and my undutiful conduct to my father would have hardly afflicted me at all, had it not been a mistake as well as an error.

We reached the Grange, and I walked into the home of my youth as a visitor. I could not run in unceremoniously, as in happier days I might have done. I can hardly now bear to recall my father's greeting; it was kind; much kinder than I deserved, but my excitement, hard as I tried to preserve my composure, was so painful, that I was scarcely conscious of anything except an oppressive weight on my heart which seemed on the point of choking me.

Every thing was dim and indistinct, and though grievously ashamed of an emotion

which in another I should probably have scoffed at as affected, it was some time before I could subdue the voice of nature, or regain anything like the lightness of my usual tone.

“Henrietta, where is your husband?” at length my father asked, in a voice which forced me to attend and answer.

I said he was in London, on business, and that I was not at all able to say when he would return to me. It was in vain that I endeavoured to speak these words with the composure of indifference; there must have been an accent in my voice, which in spite of my wishes, betrayed the misery of my feelings, which revealed at once my sore and angry emotion. My father looked at me fixedly for a moment, then coming up to me he said, as he passed his hand over my forehead:

“Poor child! and is this all you have gained?” He stopped, but his eyes and the quivering muscles of his face spoke the rest.

Till that moment I never knew how he loved his wilful daughter.

Overpowered, surprised, touched to the heart, I caught his hand in mine, and clasping him round the neck, I sobbed out in broken gasps :

“ Oh, papa, I am very sorry, for I am very unhappy !”

Well for me was it that pride and reserve gave way to the force of truthful and natural emotions. The small amount of domestic happiness which I have ever enjoyed, I trace entirely to that moment of unreserve ; and the incalculable load of misery which would probably have been mine, but for the intervention of my father's kindness, makes me shudder even now, when I look back on what was, and what might have been.

The sorrows of my life have resulted from my own perverseness, its happiness has sprung from the unmerited kindness of my friends alone.

I saw clearly enough that to make my situation thoroughly understood by my own family, so as to gain their assistance in arranging my affairs, was the best and surest way to obtaining my wishes; which all centered at present in recalling my husband to my side, and narrowing the connection with his family into the smallest possible compass. So although to confess all, was to humble myself, and own how thoroughly I had been duped, I yet did take this course, and partly to my father, partly to St. John, made such acknowledgments as enabled them to take my affairs in hand with a fair prospect of settling them comfortably.

A reconciliation with my husband, they, and especially St. John, warmly insisted on. Unless I would promise to behave in a womanly and wife-like way, he declared he would not meddle in the matter at all. I wanted the first overtures to come from Theodore, whose unkindness in leaving me, naturally made a deeper impression on my

mind, than my own provoking petulance had done on my memory. But it was no use pleading pride, or urging resentful feelings on St. John; he took only right and wrong into consideration, and would sacrifice all convenience and present satisfaction for the sake of duty.

I tried to banter him, by accusing him of upholding a husband's authority with a prospective view to his own approaching assumption of the position; but he cut me short there, by coolly asserting that he could not for a moment imagine the existence of circumstances making it necessary to assert his authority.

"No, Henrietta, it is for your sake I urge concession; for your sake entirely that I regret your petulance and resentment: and especially for your sake that I implore you to yield. Every chance of respectability, of happiness, of comfort for you in future depends on your conduct now."

"Uncompromising wretch!" said I trying to

laugh away other emotions, "I suppose I must yield."

And I wrote a letter to my husband accordingly. I certified my change of residence, made some half apologies for what had passed, and sent him an invitation to my sister's wedding.

More than this I could not bring myself to concede, and even now I rather hoped to excite a little indignation, and have a little reluctance on his part to overcome.

But Theodore was guided by wiser heads, and more far-sighted minds than either his or mine. The reconciliation with my family was too desirable in a worldly point of view to allow injured feelings, personal pique, or any private motive whatever to interfere with, or to hinder it. The answer to my letter was affectionate and happy, as if no disagreement had ever existed between us; as if he had only left me from absolute necessity, and had always been expecting as well as de-

serving the invitation I had forwarded to him.

And when he followed his letter, his conduct exactly coincided with his professions. Respectful deference to my father, untinctured by either servility or resentment; playful and brotherly gallantry to Grace, open and manly friendliness to St. John; and tenderness without a shadow of reproach to me. Oh, he was a consummate actor, and deceived everyone except myself. I knew all this was unreal; and I alternately loathed and loved; craved for the attentions which a moment after disgusted me; hated his empire over me, and vainly struggled to emancipate myself from his power, when he was absent; and yet felt my whole soul prostrate before him, and subject entirely to his will.

Well, Grace married, and went away; but before she did so, my future destiny was in some degree settled; my father and brother arranged all my money matters, and Theo-

dore and I became joint-possessors of three quarters of the income which would have been mine only and unreservedly but for him. Caterina of course was rewarded with the share for which she had so industriously plotted, and to my great satisfaction, it was settled that she and her mother were to return at once to Italy for the present; I earnestly hoped never to set foot in England again.

We took a furnished house for a year about twenty miles from the Grange, and here we established ourselves. Not that this was my wish; I wanted to remain at home; having once been re-admitted within that dear sanctuary, I dreaded again to leave it; I had no confidence in Theodore's steadiness, and most painful misgivings as to the connections and interests which I believed he still maintained. My uneasiness was increased by the profound mystery observed by him on all subjects connected with his family and country. He told me nothing; he tried to persuade me there was nothing to tell; he

could not delude me, but he deluded every one else. My family thought him so particularly open and communicative: he spoke in such a frank and candid way of many things on which other men are reserved; I only, or perhaps St. John also, knew what depths there were concealed under the fair exterior, and the nearer I studied his disposition the more reluctant I became to trust myself to him.

But though my father was very kind he was firmly resolved against the Grange being our home, and Stuart, influenced by Marianne, as I believed, took the same view. I struggled in vain, and it was not till I found a coldness growing up between me and Stuart that I yielded a reluctant acquiescence to the plans they all proposed, or seconded.

And what right had I to oppose, or murmur; united to the man I myself had chosen, possessed of a competent fortune, and of the inestimable blessing of health and youth, why should I shrink from the establishment which

most women covet, and look on my husband's house as an object to be dreaded and avoided?

So reasoned they who did not know the facts; but so could not I argue who only too deeply felt the shadows around me.

CHAPTER IX.

Ah, that is sad, and yet perhaps 'tis best,
That she should die, with all the sunshine on her,
And all the benedictions of the morning ;
Before the affluence of golden light
Shall fade into a cold and clouded gray,
Then into darkness !

GOLDEN LEGEND.

FIVE years had passed away, and I was sitting one autumn evening alone beside my hearth. Alone and solitary, alike in fact and in feeling. I was reviewing these years, and sadly counting up the sorrowful clouds which, one after one, had darkened my path-way.

Ah ! my forebodings had been only too amply fulfilled ; my fears had been too entirely verified.

Theodore, for whom I had sacrificed so much, had proved unworthy of my confidence and love.

What matters it to tell me that such is always the lot of humanity; that so certainly as we fix and centre our affections on any created thing, so certainly are we preparing ourselves disappointment and misery; and that just in proportion as our passions tempt us from the right path, so do they bring their own scorpion-like punishments with them.

I knew all this! knew it by my own bitter and torturing experience. Could the knowledge console me? Do you suppose I suffered the less, because I knew my own faults had wrought my woe? Could I have gone back again, and once more worked out the great problem of life, perhaps my dear bought experience might have been something worth to me. Nay, but I had known the truth all along; I had erred not in ignorance, but in wilfulness; I might have foreseen my fate from the first. One who had deserved my

confidence had never tempted me to stray—this I might have known had I listened to reason or reflection, for I had been taught good theories. True; but good practice had never been enforced! I had known better than I acted all my life long. Self-indulgence! that was the rock which had wrecked me; a self-indulgence fostered from earliest childhood by every circumstance which had surrounded me.

Never had I learnt in my education to sacrifice my own wishes; and so the gratification of my ill-regulated impulses had stung me well nigh to death.

I will try to fill up a short sketch of these intervening years, ere the evening I allude to. On our first settling at our new home all had seemed to promise fairly. Theodore carried away with him far more of my father's good opinion than I had expected he would acquire; and through that summer and autumn I was happy enough. My family and friends at different times all visited me; of his relatives

or connections I heard nothing? and I really fancied Italy and her interests, politics, intrigues, and distractions, had lost all hold on his heart.

My influence over Theodore seemed unbounded, and his affectionate devotion was so warm that it never occurred to my imagination that it was not to be everlasting.

Judge of my surprise, my irritation, my mortification, when one afternoon without a word of invitation from me, or a sentence to announce their intentions, his mother and sister arrived at our house. Theodore professed that his surprise was equal to mine; but could I feel certain that this was the truth?

Madame Mentesi was cold, haughty, reserved as ever to me. Caterina all smiling courtesies and liveliness. She came running in, laughing at the capital joke of their sudden arrival, as if she had been a child of ten years old; she would see no fault in my reception: would persist in being delighted at having

come; would attribute my coldness only to astonishment; would caress me with professions of attachment and sisterly feelings.

How I loathed her! Nothing I could say, or do, or look, could influence her; and Theodore, sheltered by their presence from the anger which he must have read in my countenance, gave them the kindest welcome, and most pressing invitations to remain at Ashstead.

A violent quarrel between us, in our first tête-a-tête, was the immediate result. But with his mother and sister to back him, Theodore seemed another being. He announced a fixed resolution to retain his family in his house, for any period they chose to stay, and that with such a face of concentrated determined obstinacy, that I, who now began to know him well, saw that my case was hopeless.

It was in vain that I tried every argument which my imagination could suggest; equally in vain, that I gave utterance to reproaches,

menaces, or entreaties; my husband was not to be softened or irritated into acceding to my wishes. Probaby indeed, had I condescended to employ such arts as gave power to his mother and sister, I might have prevailed; but cajolery, flattery, coaxing—no, my pride loathed such mean ways; my high spirit claimed its rights straight-forward; and what was not conceded to me of right, I disdained to win by creeping subterfuge, or humiliating expedients.

Of course I was no match for Italian cunning, and unprincipled, reckless craft; I had to give way in sullen silence. The Signora had all the notions of her native country possibly, regarding the relative position of mother and daughter-in-law; she always seemed indeed to consider, not that she was living in my house, but that I was a lodger in hers. Although ostensibly I was not displaced from my position as mistress, actually I had no power, and no voice in any decision. Theodore would refuse his mother

nothing, and our wills were perpetually at variance.

Sometimes I felt strongly tempted to leave him at once, to state my wrongs to my father, and ask for his interference; but pride effectually kept me silent; I could not own to my wretched mistake. Nor were the Mentesi the only evils which I had to encounter; soon after their arrival other foreigners began to appear; sometimes a bearded Italian patriot, sometimes a smooth-tongued and tonsured priest. The former came to consult Theodore, the latter to confess his mother and sister.

Vile unprincipled men, desperate from ruined fortunes, and blasted characters, claimed him as their countryman, and demanded his assistance: or sought for his influence and aid in those perpetual plots, which at that time disturbed the whole of Italy.

What he was about I did not know, for aspirations for liberty to his country were no longer confided to my ears, but I had every

reason to suppose he was engaging deeply in the conspiracies and factions of his party.

Caterina, possessed of a fortune so magnificent for an Italian girl, was a great object of attraction, and whatever might have been her former desires for the peaceful seclusion of a conventual life and devotion to the service of Heaven, I can venture to say that her behaviour at that time, was as much the reverse of heavenly, as it was of peaceful or respectable.

Time went on; sometimes we went to London, sometimes to the seaside, sometimes to Paris; but wherever we moved, our family circle seemed always to include the same, or similar, discordant and disreputable materials.

Gradually my English friends and acquaintance dropped us; who could wonder at them? moreover I believe it was what Caterina wished. She desired to isolate me, to cut off all connection with my own country, to make me as it were a sort of prisoner in my own home. I believe she wanted to

break my spirit down to such a point that I should no longer oppose a removal to Italy, in which case, I have a notion, they had agreed that Theodore returning to that country, should devote all his fortune and talents to the revolutionary cause. How they proposed to get over the difficulty of his profession and faith, I am sure I do not know. Fortunately for me, my marriage settlements were such, that I had the control of my own fortune, and alone the right of receiving it, thanks to my great aunt's will. And I uniformly declared that no consideration should tempt me to quit my native country; Theodore might, of course, go if he pleased, but I was so far my own mistress that I would certainly remain where I was.

After this plan had been proposed and rejected, I absolutely refused again to cross the Channel, having a nervous dread that by some artful contrivance of my sister-in-law, I should perhaps be hurried away, if once beyond the protection of English law, immured in some

mad-house, or buried in some convent abroad.

At first, I used sometimes to go and visit Grace, in her sweet, peaceful, happy home ; but I was forced to drop this ; partly because the contrast was so exquisitely painful, partly because, on my return, I always found reasons to repent my absence. Some new evil had been introduced, or some more objectionable character domesticated by my hearth.

I suppose my family suspected the state of things, but no word of sympathy, or pity was dropped by them, for no syllable of complaint ever crossed my lips. My pride compelled me to silence, and they respected my reserve. Our intercourse was confined to letters, and, of course, in the nature of things, gradually grew slighter and more matter of fact.

I had passionately desired to become a mother ; partly because I hoped such a bond would have given me more influence with my husband ; partly because, I must confess, I was unwilling the portion of my fortune,

which he had acquired by our marriage, should pass away entirely to his Italian relatives ; for by the settlements which my guardians had persuaded him to agree to, after our union, this would not be the case if we had either son or daughter. But this wish was not granted ; and in my moments of deep regret at this privation, I could sometimes almost agree in the opinion which I once heard my mother-in-law bitterly express, that a union formed in violation of vows and engagements so solemnly made, as Theodore's priestly profession had been, deserved no other fate but the curse of being childless.

Well, I was sitting, as I said, one evening, revolving many sad thoughts by the flickering firelight ; my husband had gone to London, and although I had no doubt that Caterina knew when he was coming back, I did not at all. She and I had had a bitter quarrel that afternoon, and I was not consequently likely to learn anything from her, which she could conceal ; my mind was in such a state of ex-

asperation that I had many thoughts at that moment of abandoning my house, and seeking for peace in some secluded establishment, where I could entirely conceal my former history and my sorrowful fate; when I heard the sound of carriage wheels approaching rapidly.

I concluded it was Theodore, and knowing, from past experience, that I should not see him until after his mother and sister had learnt all they had to learn, and settled all that I was to know, I did not disturb myself but remained musing with perhaps a little increase of bitterness until, to my surprise, I heard steps approaching. I had hardly time to draw back my chair from the chimney corner, before the door was opened by a servant, and Mr. Edward Moore was announced.

I started to my feet, and turning, saw my brother's grave, pale face with such an expression of anxiety and grief in every feature as almost stopped my breath.

"Edward!" was my exclamation, as I

tried to stay my beating heart, whose throbings seemed to me louder than my own voice by far.

He took my hand, and kissed me silently, solemnly, but did not offer to sit down ; indeed, for a minute he did not unclasp his arms from round me, but pressed his cold lips to my forehead with a sort of smothered, choked emotion, more alarming than words.

At length he spoke.

“Henrietta, can you come to the Grange?”

I started and cried out, I hardly know what.

“Delay may be fatal,” he said, hurriedly, “Grace, is ill there—very ill—if you would see her alive, come immediately ; when I left two hours ago, she was praying to see you once more. Come !”

I had long been learning self-control, and now it was no time to give way. I rang for my own maid, gave the requisite directions, with orders for speed and silence ; I stilled my heart’s agony, I drove back all ill-timed tears,

I repulsed all thought and reflection, except such as related to the necessary preparations; my only hope and object was to escape from the house before my husband, or his family could at all interfere.

In their distant sitting room, where they were passing the evening together, they might not hear the arrival of my brother, nor the slight bustle attending my movements. The precautions which they had taken of double doors, and thick draperies to render all that passed in their rooms inaudible to those without, at least prevented their being cognisant of all the movements of the household.

Edward's only question to me was, where was my husband? and as he was not home, he of course supposed there was no one else to concern themselves in my movements.

Hurriedly, and yet quietly, every absolutely needful preparation was made, and in less, I think, than half-an-hour, I was in the carriage with my brother, leaving directions that my

waiting-woman should account for my absence to Mr. Grey, should he arrive before she followed me the next day.

Never shall I forget that night's drive. It was late in October; an early frost, sharp for the time of year, had touched the foliage, and brought down the leaves of every tree in heaps, which strewed the carriage road and muffled the sound of wheels. A moon, nearly full, of so intense a brilliancy that we could clearly see to read by her light, was already high in the eastern heaven, travelling quietly and solemnly amidst wreaths of snowy clouds, which hung round her path and yet did not dim her lustre. A soft pearly light was thrown over the lawns and flower beds, crossed here and there by the dark blue shadows of the tall trees, whose boughs slept motionless against the purple sky. There was not a breath to stir their leaves, not a sound to awaken an echo, as I hurried down the steps from the portico, and with one quick glance round, sprang into the carriage.

The grand and solemn beauty of the night contrasted strangely with the fevered emotions of my own breast. I could not take in that all should be so peaceful, so lovely, when no eyes were there to enjoy the scene; I could not realise that there was aught of quiet or of harmony left in the world; such was the discord, the unrest of my own sad life.

Yet it seemed as I stepped out into that flood of glory and silence as if I was in fact entering suddenly some new, and brighter, passage in my existence, as if hope had dawned again, and lifted the dark cloudy curtain which had so long enveloped me. A sort of thrill of pleasure went through me, as the door closed upon my brother and myself, and we were whirled away at a rapid pace from that home of desperate misery. Then came the recollections of *why* I was going, like a stab in my heart. The short excitement produced by the necessity of speed, the dread of interruption, the anxiety to escape, had died away; I thought, not of those whom

I was leaving behind, but of her, my darling sister, ill, dying, longing to meet me once more. With a shudder I turned to Edward, and passing my hand through his arm, I whispered eagerly :—

“Oh Edward, how long—”

He understood me at once, and told me that Grace had been looking thin and pale lately, but did not complain till two days ago, when after some slight exertion she had fainted away. They were a good deal alarmed at first, but the next day she seemed better, and until that afternoon, they had expected her to be soon well, but now another attack of deadly faintness and coldness had come on ; and nothing they could do seemed to revive her. Then Edward had started off to summon me ; hoping——there he stopped abruptly, turned away his head, and looked out of the window, with a grave, almost indifferent, face, which but for his silence, would have led me to think he did not care.

I watched him for a minute, my heart yearning to share with him the feelings of distress which he tried so anxiously to hide; I feared to intrude on his reserve; but yet were we not brother and sister; equally concerned in this threatened evil—could we sit coldly silent on the one subject of our thoughts, or pretend to give our attention to other matters?

I yielded to the impulse of the moment, and throwing my arm round his neck, I cried,

“Oh Edward, I cannot, must not lose Grace—my life would be too—too miserable. Why—why should she be taken from us?”

Edward kissed me kindly and after a little pause, answered in the same measured tone:—

“It does not become us to ask why things are so, Henrietta; the Almighty is also the All-merciful; trust to Him, and you will be patient.”

But in my rebellious heart there was no feeling of trust; in my life of bitter con-

troversy and domestic strife there was no room for love or patience. To me the Almighty was a fearful thought, and I could not turn to Him in this trouble, because I would not in my others.

“Merciful!” I repeated with emphasis. “Then Grace will be spared; the one only bright spot to which in thought I can turn will not be taken from me!”

I burst into passionate tears of regret, self-pity, and anger, as I thought of my wasted affections, my disappointed hopes, my desolate and sore heart; whilst the contrast arose so powerfully of Grace and her happiness; the love which had shielded her, the peace which had surrounded her; the moral sunshine in which her wedded life had been passed. And was she to be snatched away, torn from the hearts which would break at her loss, cut down in the brightest years of her life, whilst such a woman as Caterina was permitted to darken the earth, and blight with her falsehood and treachery all the atmosphere of my home?

These were the wild thoughts which ran through my mind, and brought those floods of angry despair.

Edward folded his arm around me in silence for a short time, then in a low trembling voice, he said, "Henrietta, are you—I almost fear to ask—are you so very unhappy?"

Then burst out all the pent up feelings of the last five years, in a stream of indignant eloquence; I told him all—all—the insults, the neglect, the contradictions; the cold, careless indifference of my husband to me; his devotion to others, the cruel tyranny of his mother; the mean sarcastic spite of his sister; the dissolute companions introduced to my house; the efforts made to induce me to reside abroad; the fears I entertained. It was all told in a hurried and breathless whisper, as if I feared even now, lest I might be surrounded by spies who should report the words which for the first time I ventured to speak.

He listened in silence, and when I glanced

at his face, there was still for the most part the same look of coldness, almost indifference there; yet I knew by the pressure of his arm closer and closer round my waist, that he was not really indifferent: it was a mask which he had learnt to wear, to conceal his real feelings; a mask, partly pride, which would not condescend to make his emotions public, partly policy which taught him thus to command himself that he might the more certainly read the purposes and thoughts of others. And when I asked in my wild anger and grief as one injury after another rose to my memory and was detailed to him, "must this be borne—is there no remedy?" he answered gravely and patiently, "We will see."

I knew, notwithstanding the quietness of his tone, that he was in earnest in his resolute purpose to help me.

"And you have borne all this," said he, at last, "and never told us; never sought counsel or comfort? Did Grace know?"

"Grace—no, I would have cut off my right hand rather than have dimmed her pure happy life with my self-imposed misery. Oh! Edward, *that* is the worst, most stinging thought of all; it is my doing—I brought it on myself."

"Most of our miseries, I might say, all, are brought on by ourselves," was his answer.

"Oh! no, no, St. John's grief now; has he brought on that himself?" cried I, passionately.

"I did not say grief, Henrietta; sorrow and misery are not the same things. Indeed, no christian ought to be miserable, with the consciousness of being in a Father's Hand, and with the hope of heaven hereafter. St. John knows this well."

Happy St. John, happy Grace; yes for them there was no despairing misery, for beyond every earthly care was the bright hope for the future gilding every momentary trouble. Misery was for such as me; for I

had thrown away every blessing granted to me in my youth, and purchased to myself a curse, through every talent entrusted to my use. I had lived for selfish gratification, and the bitter, bitter draught I had thus prepared for myself had to be drained to the last drop.

As we drew nearer the Grange, overwhelming anxiety for what might be at that moment the state of things there, tended to calm my violent emotion; I could no longer think of my own misery alone, and the sort of suspense in which we were, silenced and engrossed us both. I looked out earnestly from the window, as the scene became familiar to my eye, and fast as we travelled, to my impatience it seemed all too slow. We entered the woods at the verge of the park, and their dark shadowy branches, their trunks mottled here and there by moon-beams, but mostly standing black and awfully sombre, reminded me of the gloomiest images, and chilled my heart. It seemed as if the very home scenery had

assumed a mourning garb for my young sister's death, and sympathised with the impending sorrow awaiting our arrival.

How eagerly Edward bent forward to scan the house when we reached the open grounds again, and with what a voice of emotion he exclaimed as he did so:—

“Thank heaven! we are in time, she still lives. That light in the oriel-window, Henrietta, is the sign that we are not too late.”

I do not know what I felt or thought; *nothing* I believe; we spoke not another word, until the carriage stopped, and in a tumult of agonised feelings, I found myself once more in my father's hall. Marianne met us, with a grave step and a hushed voice.

“No better, sinking still—no hope—Come, Henrietta, she asks for you every minute.”

I threw off my wraps, and my sister-in-law taking my hand, we went upstairs together, and reached the room where the centre of our anxiety lay.

The young white face, white as the pillow

on which it rested, was turned towards the door, looking unspeakably calm and sweet, yet with an expression of weakness, an air of exhaustion, which told of past struggles, and sufferings, although they had now subsided into peace. Beside her sat St. John, holding her hand, and watching that beloved face with a shadow on his own brow such as I had never seen there before; an unspoken, unspeakable agony of hope and fear, an effort at submission, and an intense yearning tenderness for the fainting form beside him; it was the saddest, most touching sight I ever saw, to read the gaze which the doting husband fixed on the placid face of his dying wife.

Marianne's warning, and my own sense had induced me to silence all emotion, and I thought my stealthy tread would not have been heard, but it was. Grace suddenly opened her eyes, and with a ray of excitement lighting up her face, as she feebly stretched out her hand, she whispered :

“Henrietta—dearest.”

I was at her side, I clasped her hands, I kissed her cheeks, her lips, in silent, subdued, yet passionate emotion. I all but choked myself in my resolution to quiet my throbbing heart, but I could not speak.

She closed her eyes again, and the death-like hue of her face would have made me immediately think she was gone; but that I could see the slow heaving of her chest, as the breath came and went faintly, and with an effort. They gave her stimulants every few minutes; they did all they could to call back the fleeting spirit, but it was in vain. Strength returned for a short space, only to ebb away again more entirely; every struggle was briefer, every whispered word was fainter and softer.

“St. John, lay my head on your shoulder. I am going from you—I have had a happy life—I did not wish to leave you quite so soon, but I am very weary now, and shall sleep—” so she breathed out her thoughts, in faint low murmurs—then she drew me closer

and whispered my name and blessed me again and again ; and said a loving farewell to Edward, her darling brother. She said she was weary, and earth was dark, and the last words I heard her whisper were :

“ I shall *see* in heaven,” and then, whether she slept or not, we did not know ; and none of those who stood around could tell when the soul fled, except her husband, who alone felt the last pulsation of her heart, the last breath on his cheek. We only knew that it was over, because at length he softly and reverently kissed her lips, and laid her down on the pillow. Then I understood that my sister was gone !

There was a great and solemn stillness in the room ; no tears, no sobs, no words from those who stood around. What others thought or felt I do not know ; but for me, looking at the beautiful face of my dead sister, I forgot for a brief interval every selfish care and sorrow, and dwelt in imagination only on the change to her.

But when I left that room, there rushed over my soul a sense of such utter desolation and misery, as no words might express. Yes, no doubt she was happy and at rest, but she would never come back again; I had lost her for ever from my side; lived I longer or shorter, I should never hear her sweetest voice, or be cheered by her tenderest smiles; were I rejoicing, she could not partake my pleasure; were I miserable, she could not sympathise in my grief: never, never could I have a sister more. I, who of all human beings, most wanted the aid, the sympathy, the tenderness of sisterly love! Such were the thoughts which rushed over my mind, as I left the room, and which wrung from me a bitter cry, the long suppressed voice of passionate sorrow and self-pity—"My sister, my sister, what shall I do without you?"

The succeeding days were a blank; I was very ill, and hardly knew who came and went around me, who watched and nursed me. It was long before memory entirely came back,

but by slow degrees I woke up to a remembrance of my own bitter fate, and as strength returned I felt that I must again take up my wearisome burden, must once more go back to my dreary life.

But when I spoke of it, they would not hear me; Edward had revealed my frantic confessions of misery, and my family were resolved to interfere.

Meanwhile my husband and his family had gone abroad, and to follow them, even I admitted was impossible. Although I was really anxious to do my duty, both to him and others, I did not feel that it lay in plunging along with him into the labyrinth of conspiracy and intrigue, in which I knew he was involved. A great change had come over my feelings whilst I was lingering on a sick bed; not a healthy one, perhaps; I do not mean to defend it; a spirit of asceticism had seized me; I had a notion of atoning for past faults by present self-inflicted mortifications; and I would, I thought, have gladly humbled my-

self to Theodore, and submitted to him as a penance due to my former errors. But I was not so lost to common sense as to venture to follow him, where I should have been exposed, helpless and undefended to the machinations of his sister.

So I stayed quietly in England, and wrote to him a wife-like and affectionate letter.

The answer came, returning my letter from the Superior of some convent. Theodore had returned, they said, to the faith from which he had strayed, had recanted his errors; done penance for his sins, and was now once more, a true son of the true Church. Consequently he no longer regarded me as his wife; the connection between us, was, so far as his conscience was concerned, at an end, and he would and could have no future communication with me.

I was astounded. To deny his marriage was the last thing I had expected either him or his sister to do; for would it not infer the forfeiture of the money for which they had

perjured themselves? But I found I did not know them yet. They had no intention of giving up the profits of their cunning and treachery; and they calculated, justly enough, that my sense of honour would not allow me, by endeavouring to reclaim it, to assert I had not been his wife. Besides, I suppose the law would not have restored it to me, had I wished, for most certainly we had been lawfully married, and whatever his conscience might suggest, I apprehended his previous vows of celibacy would not have been recognised as a reason for setting it aside.

No, they knew well how to play their game, and so far as worldly profit was concerned they might be said to be the winners. So I remained alone; a widowed wife, fettered by all the restraints, devoid of all the blessings of matrimony. The affection, the support, the sympathy, which I could not receive from my husband, I could seek nowhere else. I had to be sufficient for myself, to learn to live unprotected, unsheltered in all those respects

where protection and shelter are dearest to a woman. A Niobe at heart, turning to stone, over the tomb of dead hopes, and perished visions, and extinct wishes for that which never could be. To me were shut up all the sweetest flowers of life; self-sacrifice for love; the fond devotion which lives in another's welfare; the recompense in that loving confidence, that sweet appreciation, that domestic sovereignty, which is woman's vision of earthly bliss, which is woman's supreme and heart-contenting happiness.

For me even to muse on such things as what might have been, was now a forbidden luxury; and so I saw year after year pass by, and youth and beauty went away from me, fading slowly as each year dragged on, and I was still a wreck upon the rocks of ill-judging passion; my heart and all my better feelings still prisoners as it were, in the deep and sunless dungeon where my husband's renunciation of me had plunged them.

Why should I tell more? It was all dis-

appointment and sorrow. At one time I had hoped that Edward's love and confidence would be my compensation; but after the first few weeks Edward again shut up his heart, and by and bye, he married—married Marianne's elder sister, just as she wished, and then he was no more to me.

One after one, my friends and family have been taken from me. My father, St. John, then my brothers; and now I stand alone. I am, I believe, really a widow now; Theodore I heard died in Italy; and his wretched sister, after an unhappy marriage, is now an inmate of a lunatic asylum. Till death parted us, I never knew how fully I entertained the hope that some day, penitent and constant still, my husband would return to me, and I should have the happiness of forgiving him once more. But no such romantic termination to my life of penance awaited me; real life does not usually supply the scenes which make pathetic finales to tales of imagination; and my story is very real.

My days are sad and lonely ; I am unloved, and the only interest my life excites is in those who will be enriched by my death.

Do you who read the story of my life beware of the mistakes which made me miserable, and then I shall not quite have lived in vain.

THE END.



